

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background

India is a fast-growing country in Asia with having a great population, booming economies, and strong military arrangement including nuclear power. It has both cooperative as well as competitive relation with its neighbouring states. In recent years, Indian has made foreign policy priorities in a more specific way of engagement and cooperation. India has been trying to cultivate economic, cultural and strategic relations with neighbours and thereby trying to present itself as a regional power on the one hand and on the other, it has been cooperating in bilateral and as well as multilateral ways so as to present an efficient actor in global affairs.

After the landslide victory of NDA in 2014, Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister of India leaving several senior leaders. When Modi came to office, he gave foreign policy priorities to a new level. Analyzing the need of Indian foreign Policy recalibrating, his government has upgraded two decades long 'Look East Policy' to 'Act East Policy'.

Look East Policy was formulated by the then Prime Minister PV Narsimha Rao in 1992 which aimed at having economic engagement with its South East Asian neighbours especially ASEAN. Just after the end of the cold war and thereby fall of the bipolar world, the global economy as well as the strategic structure has changed. Similarly, it was the time when India faced a financial crisis. So, the PV Narsimha Rao government found itself at the juncture of revisiting its economic as well as foreign policy. As a part of foreign policy, in order to boost the economy out of the crisis, Look East policy was adopted. Khalid (2018, para.10) opines the purpose of LEP as " a part of a focus to strengthen trade and strategic relations with Southeast Asian nations" Further, it was start of the reorientation of Indian foreign policy

which is marked as a major transition from Neharuvian idealism to pragmatism. This provided India an opportunity to minimize potential threats, and at the same time working to develop cordial economic and political relations with the Southeast Asian region. The application of LEP has two dimensions. One is looking Northeastern Indian states and thereby neighbouring states for economic integration and the second is to engage economically with East Asian Tigers of the time as countries like Singapore, Malaysia etc. are doing great economic leap.

India, during the period of the cold war, neither able to further its national interests best nor promotes its place in the global sphere. By tracking the right time to revive its close link with the countries of Asia, the need for “Look East Policy” is justified. Then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao gave the policy a further boost with the assistance of Foreign Minister Madhavrao Solanki and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh (Mehrotra, 2012, pp. 75-85). Ever since the assumption of charge in May 2004, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, on various forums, has repeatedly stressed the enormous benefits likely to accrue to India in general and its north-eastern region in particular through an intensification of ties with ASEAN and its member countries, especially in the field of trade and commerce. The focus of the geo-economic potential of the northeastern region as India’s gateway to South East Asia is the crux of LEP. India’s Look East Policy is aimed at gradual integration of this region with the thriving market across the borders. At the time when the policy was framed, India’s economy was growing at 4–5 percent annually, while the South East Asian nations were showing a remarkably steady growth of 7–8 percent and had earned the title of East Asian tigers. India is catching up with them at a good speed with an improved economic growth rate, as it moves forward with a policy of Open Skies and Free Trade with South East Asia.

Since the global as well as the regional context in international relations has been changed, India finds itself at right time to track the situation as per her national interest; by upgrading the objectives of Look East policy into more action. Under the leadership of Mr. Narendra Modi as a newly elected Prime Minister of India, took policy shift to “Act East” from “Look East”. It was announced at the East Asia Summit in November 2014 at Nay Pi Taw, Myanmar with the intent of deeper level of engagement and interaction along with a strategic partnership with the countries in Southeast Asia especially with ASEAN countries as well as with the countries in Indian Ocean region and Asia-Pacific region.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Foreign Policy is an extension of domestic policy. Indian foreign policy has multiple avenues. It has both cooperation as well as competition with neighbouring countries on various fronts. Most of India's state relationship is characterized by the element of cooperation as well as competition. Since India has upgraded its foreign policy from Look East to Act East, it is assumed as strategically intended as Kapila (2016, para.1) opines “... was impelled by India’s strategic imperatives to establish its strategic footprints in Southeast Asia”.

As India wants a stronger and deeper relationship with South East Asian countries, it has been focusing its cooperation and engagement at a deeper level. Increments in bilateral and multilateral trade along with security concerns are obvious in India's periphery. Moreover, India is concerned with its trade and partnership with like-minded countries on the one hand and on the other, assertive Chinese presence in the region, especially in its vicinity. India's Northeastern states are behind the average standard in comparison to other states. India in this context, want to make it practical in the realm of economic prosperity by strongly engaging with South East Asian countries. In the same line, Chinese influence in the

region is a potential threat to India. In order to fulfill the domestic need for energy and resources, India wants to protect its rights and interest in the Indian Ocean Region along with the South China Sea. The issue of ownership, control, use and exploitation of the oil and gas, minerals and fishery resources in the South China Sea has emerged as a major dispute between China and several ASEAN countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, and Malaysia. India is also concerned as more than 40 percent of its trade passes through the South China Sea. India is also luring in harnessing fossil resources in the region for meeting its energy needs. The Indian involvement in the South China Sea, though India has a soft approach of advocating free navigation and settlement of disputes by peaceful talks, is taken as 'balancing' in the region (Scott, 2015, para. 3). This tells India's specific 'to do' interest in the Southeast Asia region, especially with ASEAN.

The South East Asia region is also a place for other active players like China and the USA. As India wants to balance the region by deeply engaging in the region, another important point in an opposite coin is that China does not want external powers involvement in its vicinity which it says the concerned parties will settle the issue by peaceful talks. In the same, China blames the US for disturbing the security environment in the Asia Pacific region. The Indian Ocean Region is equally important for India as it is its backyard and India does not want external power to disturb peace and security. In this background, Southeast Asia is going to be a hot and disputable land which will have a global impact in the near future.

1.3 Research Questions

Following questions are tried to answer:

1. In what ways Indian Act East Policy is different than Look East Policy?
2. What are the points of engagements of AEP?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of AEP?

1.4 Research Objectives

The general objective of the study is to assess India's Act East policy by analyzing India's engagements under it. The specific objectives are:

- a. To examine 'Act East Policy' vis-à-vis "Look East policy" of India
- b. To analyze Indian engagements under AEP

1.5 Significance of the Study

Foreign Policy shift matter in Indian performance in global affairs. There are areas of cooperation as well as competition in relation with state relations. As India launched ambitious visioning to acquire long-run strategic benefits under AEP, there seems to have some conflict of interest in the region, especially in Southeast Asia. India, under Modi, has upgraded its 20 years long Look East Policy to Act East intending to have deeper economic engagement with Southeast Asia especially ASEAN region along with Japan, South Korea, and Australia. This move is characterized as strategically calculated to have a better presence for long run Indian interest. Quite similarly, China is assertive in both regional as well as global arena under the leadership of President Xi Jin Ping. It has also launched very ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) intending to revive its ancient Silk Route and thereby expanding its presence and influence in the global sphere. BRI is considered as a Chinese Marshall Plan. It has intended to revive both land and sea silk routes. Both countries approach and initiative is mandatory for attaining domestic needs related to resources as well as maintaining security from any sorts of threats.

ASEAN is an association of ten countries which have vibrant economies. India-ASEAN relations have been 25 plus years. During these periods, the trade and cooperation between the parties have been growing. At the same time, the Southeast Asian region is strategically important. Obama Administration in the US, in 2012, shifted its foreign policy

priority to Asia centering Asia-Pacific region as 'Asia Pivot'. Major stakeholders are attracted by the vibrant economy of the ASEAN region. Some countries in the region have territorial disputes with China including the South China Sea. China, India and other stakeholders are dependent for the same route of the Indian Ocean for their bulk trade. Malacca Strait, 900 km long passage which links world trade, is considered as highly strategic chokepoint from where more than 50,000 merchant ships ply the waterway every year. Similarly, 90 percent of Japan's total crude oil imports from the middle and nearly 80 percent of China's crude oil imports pass through it from the Middle East and Africa. Since the powerful countries are focusing their interest in the region, the Indian policy shift is taken as a balance of power strategy to counter potential rival China in the region. So, this study of assessing Act East policy by analyzing Indian engagements is important. The study of foreign policy in the international state system is essential to find the ground reality and thereby find some adoptive ways for further.

1.6 Limitations

Foreign policy and inter-state relations have multiple dimensions. In the same line, Indian foreign policy also has the same multiple dimensions. So, the analysis of each and every aspect in a single study is challenging. This study focuses on India foreign policy shift from LE to AE by analyzing the Indian engagements during the period 2014-19 of Modi's 1st government. The topic of study being set in the recent timeframe i.e. Act East policy was enacted in November 2014 might mean the less availability of literature to conduct thorough research. Obstacles in the form of unavailability of resources are also to be considered. In the same line, as per the need on this research, the bilateral as well as multilateral relation of India with China along with ASEAN-China is also considered to review. Further, policies and practices of others are considered but it is related with Indian engagements as this study predominantly deals with the Indian foreign policy shift and its concerns.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

Foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy. Since every state have its own national interests and to follow and expand such interests, foreign policy are formed and practiced.

Political realism is a view of international politics that stresses its competitive and conflictual side of international relations/foreign policy. Realist considers the principal actors in the international arena to be states which are concerned with their own security. Further, according to the Realist, states act in pursuit of their own national interest and struggle for power. So, this study is based upon realist theory of foreign policy. In particular, balance of power strategy is considered while analyzing India's foreign policy shift from LEP to AEP.

1.8 Organization of the Study

Chapter 1: Introduction

This introductory part sets the background of the study and includes the statement of problem, objectives, significance, limitations, and organization of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature by various scholars in the field of foreign policy, Indian Foreign Policy and India's Look East and Act East Policy were reviewed in order to create a discussion on the relevant matters of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter demonstrates the research design, data collection, nature and sources of data and tools and techniques of data collection during this research.

Chapter 4: Result and Analysis

This chapter dealt with the major aspects of Indian foreign policy shift, answered how Act East Policy is different than Look East Policy. It also analyzed Indian engagements under Act East policy.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion

The final chapter discussed and analyzed the findings of the research, thus drawing the conclusion.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Foreign Policy decision making and implementation has multiple levels. Stein (2012, pp. 131-132) expresses three models namely rational; psychological and neurological models. Indian foreign policy decision making also has similar type of decision making in line with aforementioned models. In order to analyze Indian Foreign Policy shift from Look East to Act East, the available books, research articles, magazine, newspapers, web based documents are reviewed.

Myanmar holds a special position in India's neighbourhood vis-à-vis 'Act East policy'. Besides being its closest Southeast neighbor, Myanmar's importance in Indian foreign policy is marked by its long porous international border with Northeast India (Kundu 2016, para. 3).

Several significant areas where AEP has gone far beyond what LEP achieved in 20 plus years. AEP has imparted greater vigor to India's ties with ASEAN under the clout of rapidly changing geopolitical realities, defined by the assertive rise of China. [...] and AEP has sought to significantly expand its geographical coverage beyond ASEAN alone, to include other countries like Japan, Australia, Pacific Islands, South Korea, and Mongolia (Sajjanhar, 2016, p. 2). There are positivity in Indo-Japan relations as India's partnership with Japan has witnessed the most dynamic growth. He further sees positive steps of AEP towards building closer relationships with India's partner while assessing Modi's governments' frequent high-level visits in ASEAN plus surrounding countries. He opines India's AEP must continue to focus on strengthening collaboration with the ASEAN; improving Northeast India and Myanmar connectivity; work to strengthen ties with East Asia, particularly Japan,

Republic of Korea and Australia and continuous engagement with China to expand cooperation particularly on the economic front (Sajjanhar, 2016, pp. 3-4)

India's deepening relation with ASEAN as a tool to maintain a balance in the region. Narendra Modi's speech at the annual summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) showed to enhance their cooperation in advancing balance, peace, and stability in the region and ample attention from India's envisioned pivot to Asia as India's planned pivot is freighted with significance for the country's economic prospects, and for its relationship with the United States (Kugelman, 2016. para 6).

The shift from LEP to AEP is a notable policy up gradation, not a mere rebranding, to the region which is witnessing the sharpest international power play involving the U.S. and China (Bhatta, 2016, para. 5).

The need of Indian foreign policy shift from LEP to AEP as India could not stay aloof in changing security dynamics of the Asia-Pacific region which have an overarching influence on the countries of the region. Indian strategic move in the region as China's extraordinary ascendancy to the world stage and its gradually intensifying competition with the United States and Japan have led to a tectonic shift, in Asia-Pacific politics. Indian presence is pivotal amidst US Rebalancing towards Asia, Japan's Democratic Security Diamond, and China's Maritime Silk Road which all have political-strategic grand-designs to shape the regional architecture in their own way and ASEAN is not secondary anymore to India. As China is drawing closer to South Asian countries, he finds logical for India to make Southeast Asia part of its primary theater. He views the Chinese Maritime Silk Route as a perfect opportunity to engage Southeast Asian countries, both economically and militarily (Mishra, 2014, para 2).

India has suspicion on Chinese BRI. India intends to balance China by pivoting its diplomacy toward countries such as the US, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and even Mongolia. Furthermore, he sees the Modi government's initiatives Project Mausam is a response to Chinese 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Zhaoli, 2015, para. 14-16). On the contrary, Zhaoli sees more prospects of cooperation between China and India. He states that interest cooperation exceeds interest competition in the two countries' strategic designs. He further asserts that China aims to establish a close cooperative and developmental partnership with India.

India involved in the South China Sea as a part of its AEP and is creating a power struggle between China and other claimants as the consequences. India and China both are spreading strategic competition in the Indian Ocean. The competition over strategic space in the Indian Ocean create more tension and room for conflict with further uncertainties for the region. Multilateral engagement including China and other stakeholders should establish norms of behavior and a code of conduct in the region (Baruah, 2015, pp. 8-10).

Indo-Japanese strategic partnership is Asia's response to Chinese rise. As the interaction between India and Japan at the focus on China's ascendancy, the developing strategic and economic entente between Japan and India may eventually prove to be as important in shaping Asia's future. The complementarities between the two powers at opposite ends of the Asian landmass are equally striking. Japan is a capital-rich, technology superpower while India has teeming supplies of human capital and the world's largest labor pool. Japan has the world's most advanced infrastructure, while India's own requirements for modern transportation and urban networks exceed in scale those of any other country (Twining, 2013, para. 1-2).

There are five principal considerations which drive India's Foreign Policy through which lie its relationships with the United States and China are Conventional Security, economic growth, energy sector, Nuclear Capability and Nonproliferation, and prestige security. India's principal priority is ensuring conventional security for its country and its people (Dormandy, 2007, p. 1). In recent years, India has built up a strong and capable Army, Navy and Air Force: the third, fourth and seventh largest in the world respectively... He further clarifies that India's main conventional threat is perceived to be Pakistan these two nations had a military stand-off. He sees Indian foreign policy drive is concerned with economic growth Energy Sector, Nuclear Capability, and Nonproliferation and Prestige Security (Dormandy, 2007, pp. 4-6).

Indian Foreign Policy evolution is shaped by Jawaharlal Nehru, who viewed the West with skepticism and had a rosy view of socialist ideals. This led to foreign policy that was built on three key pillars: nonalignment in the international arena; preservation of autonomy in domestic affairs; and solidarity among developing nations, particularly those that had recently gained independence from colonial powers. This policy continued throughout the Cold War when India leaned toward the Soviet Union while deftly maintaining strategic autonomy and charting its own course in a bipolar international order (Younus, 2019, para. 2). He further sees the worldview began to evolve following the collapse of the Soviet Union and an economic crisis at home. India slowly opened its economy through careful economic liberalization [...] at the same time began to engage with the rest of a world on a different set of norms. A newfound pragmatism began to emerge and by the late 1990s India was willing to place its own national interest – both economic and security – ahead of broader ideas of global justice and equity. He identifies present-day Indian Foreign Policy as Narendra Modi's rise to power accelerated the shift, as he sought to not only push India to be a global leader but to also secure his legacy as a transformative prime minister whose stature would rival

some of India's greatest political leaders. In the last four years under Modi, India has sought to play a greater role in solving global challenges and shaping the rules, norms, and processes that guide these efforts.

There has been a debate in the policy and academic community about its foreign policy since the Narendra Modi government came to power in India in May 2014 (Pant, 2019, para. 1). He opines that though Narendra Modi is seen a more energetic and visible prime minister on the foreign policy front, he has only tinkered with the long-held foreign and national security assumptions of India. He sees the change from "Look East" to "Act East," change the nomenclature but in practice, India's engagement with East and Southeast Asia remains a continuation of the past. He forecasts that though it may want to be a big player on the global stage, it doesn't have the ability to project its aspirations adequately. He further states that the Modi government has redefined strategic autonomy as an objective that is attainable through strengthened partnerships rather than the avoidance of partnerships.

Chapter III

Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research is mixed in nature. Predominantly dealing with the qualitative aspects of social science research, it also inculcates a quantitative approach if necessary to data relevant to use via secondary sources. This thesis is mainly a library-based research mostly online library. Though the primary concern is given to the perusal of books, articles, and journals, the literature available through online library data is taken for consideration due to the unavailability of sufficient hardcopy literature.

3.2 Data Collection:

This study is conducted in Nepal. Predominantly, this research is an attempt to examine the Indian policy shift from LE to AE by analyzing its engagements. So, as per the information required to answer the research question, books, journal articles like secondary sources were review.

3.3 Nature and sources of data

The study is mainly qualitative in nature. However, adding some statistical information in order to compare trade and diplomatic visit made this study a mixed one. As per the mixed nature of research, this thesis is based on mainly qualitative data collection and interpretation and partly quantitative as well. The data collection was assumed to have book review as primary sources of information, due to unavailability of such resources made this research more library based on specializing online sources. However, available books, journal articles, interviews of distinctive fellows and political leaders including position bearers were reviewed.

3.4 Tools and techniques of data analysis

As the data are from secondary sources, the content analysis method is applied to analyze the relevant literature and the collected data. The steps of data analysis i.e. preparation; defining the theme of analysis; developing categories and coding scheme; pre-testing; coding; assessing the consistency and drawing inferences on the basis of coding themes and presentation of results is made.

Chapter IV

Results and Analysis

4.1 India's Foreign Policy: Look East to Act East

The foreign policy aims at protecting and promoting national interests. Indian foreign policy has multiple vistas of national interests. Since its independence, India has been trying its best to secure its national interest via foreign policy. India, as an emerging power in the global sphere, obviously has its interest to be protected and promoted. South East Asian countries especially the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been in top priority of Indian Foreign Policy after the end of the cold war. Moreover, after the financial recession of 1991, India adopted several economic and financial reformations back at home and tried to be engaged with other nations to boost trade and commerce which, at that time, was essential. In this background, India adopted Look East policy as a part of foreign policy specializing to look and engage with South East Asian countries.

After the fall of the cold war, the global, as well as the regional scene, has gone through several upheavals. The issues like security and trade have gone to new dynamics. In the immediate need to restructure both domestic as well as external apparatus, India started Look East Policy as a part of its foreign policy. The primary need of the time was to focus on economic tigers of the time i.e. ASEAN countries.

The Look East Policy was formulated and enacted by the leadership of the then Prime Minister P.V. Narsing Rao in 1992. The changed scenario of the time considered as a new politico-economic context for India's regional diplomacy on the one hand and on the other, it was a need for the reassessment and reorientation of Indian foreign policymaking. The question of why India started Look East policy has divergent views. The most prominent is on the one hand India wanted to engage itself with Asian Tigers so as to bolster its own economy and on the other, it has been very anxious and alert due to the Chinese influence in

the region, which made Indian establishment remember previous instances, and thereby try to counterweight in the region. On the same line, influential voices in India started lobbying for more dedicated foreign policy to protect and promote its national interest. India at the point of history needed to seek new opportunities and look towards new frontiers to serve further the national interests (Mehrotra, 2012, p. 75). It was the same period when India started liberalization process followed by the domestic economic crisis. The fundamental changes in internal as well as external milieu together with the dramatic success of China and the Southeast Asian economies resulted in an Indian desire to connect to the East Asian economies.

The new approach to Southeast Asian countries was the change made by the Indian establishment as a course correction. It was the period when Southeast Asian countries were doing a miracle in economic progress and at the same time India was having troubles in domestic economics. ASEAN was a region characterized by economic miracles and that afforded India a chance to enter the arena for Asian power politics. As India is desirous of seeing itself as an integral part of Asian geopolitics, it became imperative to reconstitute the core premises of Indian foreign policy thinking. Moreover, the growing complexity of the evolving Sino-Indian relations though primarily rooted over security issues had also expanded to include economic and institutional instruments related to the recognition of status. As a result, Indian Foreign Policy priorities focus on both Chinese material power and international status. It was Indian move to make intensive relations with South East Asia as China had been closely involved in the regional concerns of peace, security, stability, and development.

The Look East Policy provided India an opportunity to minimize potential threats, while simultaneously working to develop cordial relations and enhanced economic, political

and strategic ties with the Southeast Asian region. The basic features of LEP were to try and link India's liberalizing economy with the Southeast Asian markets.

The LEP can be divided into two phases; the First phase envisaged greater association with the vibrant economies of the ASEAN region and the second phase focused a significant thrust to boost trade and economic relations with the Southeast Asian countries.

4.1.1 India's Achievements under Look East policy

India's Look East Policy was a part of the Indian dynamics of responding the new challenges and opportunities; Mehrotra (2012, pp. 76-78) illustrates the following achievements India has, so far, achieved under Look East Policy:

- India has diversified its economy with East Asian Tigers with having a steady growth of 7-8 percent when India was lagging at 4-5 percent annually. India moved forward with a policy of Open Skies and Free Trade with South East Asia.
- India's trade with ASEAN countries has multiplied several times since India launched its Look East policy. The partnership with ASEAN, based on free trade and certain common security interests, makes it possible for India to interact with South East Asian community with a combined GDP of \$750 billion as a collectivity.
- India has progressed its relations with vast community of multiple avenues as it has started in 1992 as "Sectoral dialogue partnership" to "full dialogue partnership" along with ASEAN +1, ASEAN+4 and also attends ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) which annually reviews the security situations.
- Establishment of ASEAN-India Green Fund in 2007 at 6th ASEAN- India Summit was a major initiation of Indian approach towards Southeast Asia especially to ASEAN. Different projects like a mutual S&T Digital Centre, a

Technology Information Commercialization Portal, Virtual Institute for Intellectual Property were implemented. Increase in bilateral exchanges under the ASEAN-India Media Exchange Programme has brought new prospects to mutual interest.

- East Asian Summit is another further extension of Indian Look East policy which comprises ASEAN and the Greater East Asia comity of nations. In Mehrotra's words, "... it is inspired by a new vision of Asia as being central to the world's economic growth, political stability and strategic balance... concentrates on five core areas of energy, education, finance, pandemics, and disaster management."
- Involvement in EAS, India has made itself a prominent actor in regional as well as global issues as the then Prime Minister Mr. Man Mohan Singh used the forum in Sixth EAS in Bali, to discuss "common challenges cutting across boundaries" like terrorism, prevention and response to natural disasters, piracy, protecting sea lines of communication and drug trafficking. He presented India as an efficient actor by offering to share India's expertise in disaster management and maritime security.
- India is able to maintain its stand on the South China Sea advocating freedom of navigation and thereby being able to operate oil explorations by the Oil and Natural Gas Corporations (ONGC) in collaboration with Vietnam. Though China has objected vis-à-vis the South China Sea, it has been able to maintain China with finding common ground and supporting each other in multilateral fields.
- India's relationship with Japan and subsequent Indian national interest is another positive point in the realm of Look East policy. India has been able to

attain Japanese high-tech innovative spirits like in Maruti Udyog and the Delhi Metro.

- India has been very anxious and sensitive to its North-Eastern region. To recover the lost frontier, India gives priority to its north-eastern region to establish its historical links to the neighbourhood. In this light, India has been giving high priority to Bangladesh and Myanmar and thereby formation and mobilization of BIMSTEC.
- India has paved a good track with Bangladesh by signing a landmark agreement in September 2011. It gave a new impetus to the relations which in long run play a component for trust and confidence building between the government.

4.1.2 Act East: What it means?

India, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, wanted diversification in foreign relations. In order to attain strong role and maintaining a regional presence in South East Asia, India changed its earlier Look East foreign policy towards Act East during East Asia Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, on 13 November 2014.

Act East Policy is the up gradation to earlier Look East Policy. There are distinctive features between the policies which show in what ground AEP is different than the LEP. The very specific focus of LEP was to increase economic integration with the South East Asian countries but the focus of AEP was more than that. The major focus of AEP is economic and security integration and is not limited only to South East Asia, but also extended to other regions including Japan, Australia, South Korea and even to the USA. Further, India's revised policy has more action-oriented intention and dynamism (Ganapathi, 2015, pp. 64-66).

Act East Policy, as discussed by Dr. V K Singh, previous Minister of State for External Affairs, focuses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region. It is updated in its scope to political, strategic and cultural dimensions, including the establishment of institutional mechanism for dialogue and communication (Chaturvedy, 2018, p. 5). The main points of objectives of AEP are:

- Promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop a strategic relationship with countries in the Asia – Pacific region through continuous engagement at regional, bilateral and multilateral levels.
- To increase the interaction of the North Eastern Indian States with other neighbouring countries.
- To find out the alternatives of the traditional business partners in the Pacific region along with South East Asian countries.
- To curb the increasing impact of China in the ASEAN region (Josh, 2019, para 3-6).

4.1.3 In what ways AEP is different than LEP?

Act East Policy is a conscious up gradation of LEP, a calibrated response to the changing situation in the region as well as to the evolution of India's priorities in its economic and security strategies (Bhatia, 2016, para. 4). It is upgraded in two ways. First, it redefines its geographic scope. Earlier, Indian Look East Policy mainly focused the ASEAN and the region around it vis-à-vis economic scope whereas Modi, in his speech during the visit of Bangladeshi president to India in December 2014, illustrated Bangladesh as the commence point of AEP by mentioning “India’s Act East Policy starts with Bangladesh”. He, in his next remarks at the India-US Business Summit on January 2015, illustrated United States of America (USA) as a part of Act East policy by saying: “For too long, India and the United

States have looked at each other across Europe and the Atlantic. When I look towards the East, I see the western shores of the United States (NDTV, 2015, para. 12)”.

Modi's remarks on both occasions have the same theme of revising the geographic scope of AEP. It comprises both economic and geographical scope. It also hints Indian interests to act more than the past by issuing the joint statement as “Shared Effort; Progress for All” issued during the US president’s visit on January 25, 2015 recalled, “Noting that India’s ‘Act East Policy’ and the United States’ Rebalance to Asia provide opportunities for India, the United States, and other Asia-Pacific countries to work closely to strengthen regional ties, the leaders announced a Joint Strategic Vision to guide their engagement in the region”. India’s Act East policy could be seen to include the region from Bangladesh to the Western seaboard of the USA and the countries within this geographical sweep. India, through the geographic redefinition of its Act East policy, tries to cover the forgotten realms by an earlier version of policy i.e. LEP.

Second, AEP is the policy up gradation vis-à-vis its strategic depth. The strategic cause has greater volume in AEP as it covers geographic scope as well in a broader sense. The LEP came with the intent of economic engagement and fostering trade with vibrant economies of the time (Lee, 2015, pp. 70-73). The AEP as policy up gradation expanded the definition of 'East' to include Japan, South Korea, and Australia with more strategic orientation. Regarding strategic point, India is much concerned and cautious with Chinese assertive roles South East Asian Countries along with Indian Ocean Region which is, for India, its immediate backyards and closely related with economic and security interests.

On that ground, AEP is different than LEP as the plans, policies, and activities adopted by the Modi government are different. Ashok Sajjanhar (2016, p. 3) illustrates the AEP has driven changes and progress in the following ways:

- Extensive high-level visits renewed focus and new direction of the AEP and thereby seen the progress which was once stagnating, like the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway.
- 'Connectivity' is something that has been promised and highlighted in almost every remark made by PM Modi. Most notably, at the India-ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur in November 2015, Modi allocated \$1 billion to promote connectivity with the ASEAN states through Myanmar and Thailand.
- India's relations with ASEAN have broadened to encompass security, strategic, political and counter-terrorism as well as defense collaboration. Defense collaboration, particularly with Singapore and Vietnam, have progressed after the high-level bilateral visits.
- The AEP has sought to significantly expand its geographical coverage to include countries in East Asia, like Japan, Australia, Fiji, and other Pacific Island nations, South Korea and Mongolia. Japan's commitment to invest \$35 billion in India over five years was the countable progress in the Indian approach.
- India, especially the Modi government, has sought to establish or rejuvenate ties with countries that India has not focused earlier. Modi visited Australia in November 2014, the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to that country in 29 years; his visit to Fiji in the same month was the first in 33 years; his visit to Mongolia in May 2015 marked the first ever by an Indian Prime Minister.
- Indian firm articulation of its principled position of freedom of navigation, maritime security, and expeditious resolution of disputes according to the provisions of international law, developing a Code of Conduct, and settlement through dialogue and peaceful means vis-à-vis the dispute over the South China Sea has made Indian interests in the region visible.

- India has protected its interest regarding the implementation of the free trade agreement on investment and services between ASEAN and India.
- India has broadened its strategic scope by aligning India's Act East Policy with the US 'pivot' to Asia, and Japan's Democratic Security Diamond through a joint strategic vision. This, a tool for India, will help to counter the growing assertiveness of, as well as foster balanced relations with, China.

4.2 Indian Engagements under Act East Policy

Indian effort under Act East policy has multiple vistas. India, on the one hand, has increased its engagement with South East Asian countries and on the other, it has broadened its approach and relations with other new partners like Japan, Australia, and the US as well. While categorizing Indian engagements under Act East, the major areas of engagements are economic, cultural, diplomatic and strategic engagement.

4.2.1 Economic Engagement

The main area of engagements from the Indian part under Act East Policy is economic areas. The earlier version of AEP, i.e. Look East Policy which was primarily based on economic cooperation and engagement with ASEAN countries, was further expanded and made more specifications (Bora, 2018, para. 9-10). India, from the commencement of LEP, wanted to bolster its economic relations with ASEAN along with other states in eastern hemisphere. It was on the one hand Indian need deeper engagement with vibrant economies of South East Asia so as to make Indian economy more reliable and sustainable, and on the other, its ASEAN countries need to diversify their economy along with trade.

India has given strong priority for inward development of the North Eastern States so as to connect towards South East Asian countries and Asia Pacific region. The former Union Minister of State for External Affairs Mr. V K Singh stated that improving connectivity in North Eastern states is the key to the success of the 'Act East' policy that seeks to strengthen

India's ties with countries of the Asia- Pacific region. In the same line, India has given priority to North East via connectivity to the South East Asia by which it is expected to promote trade and people to people connectivity (Prabir De R. A., 2017, para. 3). The establishment of a new consulate and a mini office in Guwahati and Agartala from Bangladesh is a good instance for the Northeast connectivity and economic integration to South East Asia. Moreover, for the connectivity and integration, Indian efforts to capacitate Northeastern states with internal as well as external resources are another landmark for economic engagement and connectivity with South East Asian countries. The Northeast part is endowed with reserves of a variety of natural resources such as uranium, coal, hydrocarbons, forests, oil, and gas. In this light, India has focused to build a better road for the connectivity in the region by the help of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) via Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA). The National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation (NHIDCL) in support of JICA is working for the construction. India expects export-led growth of indigenous production of Northeast states to South East Asian countries. Since NDA came to power, Prime Minister Modi has given greater attention to the infrastructure development in the region. Several projects funded by the Government of India have been prioritized to give the necessary impetus to the Act East Policy. The focus given to finish Kaladan Multimodal Project is one of the projects which connect Sittwe Port in Myanmar to India-Myanmar border (Madhav, 2018, para 5). Similarly, for increasing land connectivity, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway has been under upgrading via Indian support which is aimed at completing by 2021. Speaking to reporters, V K Singh, former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, stated that ASEAN and BBIN (Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal) air links have been improving and the ongoing trilateral highway will be expanded to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam (PTI, 2018, para 6). India's interest to boost Northeastern states for internal development along with connectivity to

SEAs countries; the aforementioned projects reduce goods delivery and thereby cover economic progress of the region.

ASEAN, by any means, is the crux of Act East Policy which is the sixth largest trading partner of India in 2017. Trade between India and ASEAN in the year 2016 was \$75 Billion and it has increased up to \$81 billion in 2017-2018 which was around 10 percent of India's total trade (Singh U. B., 2018, para. 11). In the span of 25 plus years, the ASEAN-India dialogue mechanism has grown to host 30 dialogue mechanisms, including an annual summit and seven ministerial dialogues, covering ranges of domains like strategic, political, economic and cultural. As India-ASEAN joined the strategic partnership in 2012, ASEAN has proved itself as India's friend and a key partner in India's growth. The ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement, which now comprises both trades in goods and services, is another significant achievement for ASEAN-India ties.

India's quest for regional influence and making economic and strategic benefits, the Modi government has given priority to river and port connectivity. The frequently used terminology of 3Cs i.e. Commerce, Connectivity and Culture; India, under Modi's leadership, want to carry out AEP strategy to boost trade and investment. India's economic and cultural engagement plan of cruise tourism network to connect ASEAN countries is another part of AEP visioning.

To make trade and commerce faster, smoother and in an efficient way, the Indian government has launched an ambitious Sagarmala Project. It is planned to promote its economic relations of trade and commerce via port-led direct and indirect development and provide infrastructure to transport goods to and from the ports quickly, efficiently and cost-effectively. The purpose behind the project is to develop access to new development regions with intermodal solutions, enhanced connectivity with main economic centres and beyond

through the expansion of rail, inland water, coastal and road services (Chaturvedy, 2018, pp. 9-10).

Maritime sector in India has been the backbone of the country's trade and has grown manifold over the years. In order to harness India's 7,500 km long coastline, 14,500 km of potentially navigable waterways and strategic location on key international maritime trade routes, the ambitious Sagarmala Programme aims to promote port-led development in the country. The concept of Sagarmala was approved by the Union Cabinet under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi on 25th March 2015 and a National Perspective Plan (NPP) for the comprehensive development of India's coastline and maritime sector has been prepared. It was released by the Prime Minister Modi, on 14th April, 2016 at the Maritime India Summit 2016 (MoS, 2018, para 2).

The need for port-led development is observed as India is one of the fastest growing large economies in the world with a GDP growth rate of 7.5% in 2015-16. Ports play an important role in the overall economic development of the country. Approximately 95 % of India's merchandise trade (by volume) passes through seaports. Many ports in India are evolving into specialized centres of economic activities and services and are vital to sustaining the future economic growth of the country such as JNPT, Mundra Port, Sikka Port, Hazira Port, etc. The needs of modernizing such ports to overcome infrastructural and operational challenges are observed by the intent to bolster its economic coverage in order to fulfill the national need of being capable to settle domestic issues on the one hand and on the other to have a stronger presence in the regional as well as global affairs.

The major focus under Sagarmala Project includes reducing the cost of transporting domestic cargo through optimizing modal mix; lowering logistics cost of bulk commodities by locating future industrial capacities near the coast; improving export competitiveness by developing port proximate discrete manufacturing clusters and optimizing time/cost of EXIM

container movement (MoS, 2018, para.1). The major components, as stated by Ministry of Shipping, under Sagarmala Programme are Port Modernization & New Port Development; Port Connectivity Enhancement; Port-linked Industrialization; Coastal Community Development which is mostly oriented toward fulfilling economic leverage. As a part of Sagarmala Programme, more than 604 projects have been identified for implementation, during 2015-2035. As of 30-Sep-2018, a total of 522 projects were under various stages of implementation, development, and completion (MoS, 2018, para. 1-3).

The priority is given with high level as the institutional framework for implementing the Sagarmala Programme is designed to create a coordinating role for the Central Government. It aims to provide a platform for the Central, State Governments and Local Authorities to work in tandem and coordinate under the established principles of “cooperative federalism” in order to achieve the objectives of the Sagarmala Programme and ensure port-led development.

India wants to diversify its tourism prospect with ASEAN countries. Expecting a major boost in tourism, the administration in Andaman and Nicobar Island (ANI) has abolished the old Restricted Area Permit (RAP) system for foreigners. The efforts made are to create facilities in some of the well-located islands to facilitate stopover of mega cruise ships that operate from Singapore, Phuket, and Bangkok.

India, under AEP, has been given high priority to the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), an initiative by six countries – India and five ASEAN countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam for cooperation in tourism, culture, education, as well as transport and communications. It is a multilateral organization India wanted to be engaged deeply with in order to carry out the objectives of AEP.

India has been very active in engaging with MGC countries. Modi's government has increased the intensity of engagement by organizing several events like first MGC Business Conclave in January 2018, Global MSME Summit, supporting MGC countries for Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). Similarly, 1st MGC Policy Dialogue, a track 1.5 event on the theme 'Stronger Connectivity, Enhancing Ties' on 8 April 2017 in New Delhi shows Indian focus towards MGC under AEP. For the same, India's support of US \$ 1 billion in a concessional Line of Credit for enhancing Connectivity, establishment of digital villages in Mekong countries as part of India's effort on promoting digital connectivity; India's contribution towards capacity building and human resource development in the CLMV countries; celebrating India-ASEAN Year of Tourism 2019, Surajkund Crafts Mela in February 2019; organizing MGC photography competition on tourism in India; conducting media programs on Buddhist and North-East circuits, and organizing tourism mart of MGC countries in India are all intended to boost India-MGC cooperation and thereby engaging stronger ties so as to AEP aspired for (MoEA, 2017, para. 14). Active engagement with MGC countries in the field of SMEs, Rice Germplasm, health and pandemics, Nalanda University Archival Resource Centre scholarship along with expanding in the fields of trade, tourism, development, movement of people and goods which is helping to carry out the targeted AEP (MoEA, 2018, para. 1).

The significance of new groups makes India's engagement with all ASEAN members with equal intensity and in similar spheres. The CLMV group has emerged as a priority for India. India has deepened its cooperation with the CLMV countries through the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral and Technical Economic Cooperation) initiatives. As per discussions in the 7th MGC SOM, India had taken the lead in formulating a draft Action Plan on MGC for 2016-2018. The

CLMV and Thailand encompassing the Indochina region is geographically closest to India and enjoy considerable economic and strategic priority in India's neighbourhood policies.

As far as the rest of the region is concerned, India's relations with individual countries have been shaped by country-specific factors. Myanmar holds a special position in India's neighborhood vis-à-vis the 'Act East' policy. Besides being its closest Southeast Asian neighbor, Myanmar's importance in India's foreign policy is marked by its long porous international border with Northeast India, India's quest for connectivity with East Asia, India's search for alternative sources of energy, and its economic linkages with the region. The opening of the land border between India and Myanmar is another economic engagements carried out under AEP. This will allow India for trade and commerce across the border and will enhance connectivity with ASEAN via Myanmar.

As India is increasing its engagement with ASEAN regarding economic front, the trade has important place in India's Act East Policy. So, the comparative study of India-ASEAN-China trade is remarkable. Similarly, the trade between India and China also is important so as to find the exact position India is having in the regional trade relations and thereby to analyze the effectiveness of India's changed foreign policy. The following table shows India's trade status with ASEAN from 2010 to 2018.

Table 1 -Trade balances between India and ASEAN (In billion USD)

Year	India exports to ASEAN	India imports from ASEAN	Total trade	Trade balance	Remarks
2010/11	25.63	30.61	56.24	- 4.98	
2011/12	36.74	42.16	78.9	-5.41	
2012/13	33.01	42.87	75.88	- 9.86	
2013/14	33.13	41.28	74.41	- 8.14	
2014/15	31.81	44.71	76.52	- 12.9	
2015/16	25.15	39.91	65.06	-14.75	
2016/17	30.96	40.61	71.57	- 9.65	
2017/18	34.20	47.13	81.33	- 12.93	

Source: Department of Commerce, Government of India (2019)

The aforementioned table shows India's trade relations with ASEAN. The export to ASEAN stood 25.63 billions USD and imports 30.61 billions USD resulting 4.98 billion USD in negative in India's trade in the year 2010-2011. The export grew to 34.20 billion USD and imports to 47.13 USD resulting -12.93 billion dollars as trade deficit in the year 2017-18. Though the trade volume has increased during the period, the trade deficit has also increased. India's interest of economic engagement with ASEAN on the one hand is in place with increment with volume but on the contrary, it is going to be difficult in India's part due to increasing trade deficit.

As ASEAN is at the centre of AEP, the trade relation of ASEAN with China is also important to analyze India's engagement with ASEAN. ASEAN-China has good economic relations. The following table shows China-ASEAN trade during the period of 2010 to 2018.

Table 2
Trade balances between China and ASEAN (In Billion USD)

Year	China exports to ASEAN	China imports to ASEAN	Total Trade	Trade balance	Remarks
2010/11	138.16	154.70	292.86	-16.36	
2011/12	170.07	193.02	363.09	-22.94	
2012/13	204.26	195.89	400.15	7.89	
2013/14	243.44	200.14	443.58	43.31	
2014/15	271.79	208.33	480.12	63.46	
2015/16	256.84	200.4	457.24	56.42	
2016/17	276.5	190.4	466.9	86.08	
2017/18	279.1	235.7	514.8	43.4	

Source: PHD Research Bureau, 2018

China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have had a long established, friendly relationship since a dialogue mechanism was established in 1991, and the two sides have witnessed increased benefits in a broad array of areas like trade and

tourism. In the year 2010-11, China imported more than export in trade with ASEAN. It was 16.36 billion of US Dollars trade deficits. The year 2012-13 marked the positive year for Chinese trade with ASEAN in which there is 7.89 trade surpluses. The year 2017-18 stood the total trade 514.8 billion of USD resulting 43.4 billion USD trade surplus.

India's intent to engage economically with ASEAN and the region has its relation in trade with China. The way China has its place in trade with ASEAN, the trade with India also considered to be under analysis. The bilateral trade between India and China has grown four-fold in the past decade. But the trade was tilted more in favour of China. India had unfavorable balance of trade with China. While China continues to enjoy a huge favourable balance of trade, it is only the India-china trade that has remained to be China's most balanced trade in South Asia. However, both these nations are growing very fast and can propel the future world economy with a pool of the world's largest skilled work force. The following table shows India's import and export with China in the period of 5 years span so as to find the India's trade relations with China.

Table 3
India's Imports and Exports with China (USD Billion)

	2001	2006	2011	2016
India's imports from China	1.83	15.64	55.48	60.48
Growth %	-	53.6%	28.8%	1.7%
Share in India's total imports	3.6%	8.8%	12.0%	17.0%
India's exports to China	0.92	7.83	16.72	8.92
Growth %	-	53.4%	16.4%	-11.8%
Share in China's total imports	0.4%	1.0%	1.0%	0.6%
Total Trade	2.75	23.47	72.2	69.4
Trade Balance	-0.91	-7.81	-38.76	-51.56

Source: Compiled, 2019

The given table shows India's import, in 2001, was 1.83 billion USD where as the export was 0.92 USD. The year 2011 witnessed a huge variation in India's import and export with China. India's import growth with China was 28.8% in the last 5 years where as export

growth was 16.4%. The year 2016 has marked negative to India trade with China as the import growth stood 1.7% in the last 5 years which is 17% of India's total imports but the exports has decreased 11.8% in the same period which is 0.6 % of China's total import. It shows that India's import is highly dependent in Chinese products as it shared 17% of its total import where as China dependent in Indian product is minimal of 0.6%. The worrying fact to India is that the increasing trade deficits with China which was 51.56 billion of USD in the year 2016 and its in increasing pattern.

4.2.2 Cultural Engagement

India's efforts on engagement with its eastern neighbours are closely linked with cultural aspects. In connection with cultural scope with AEP, India has been actively engaging with ASEAN countries. The movement of people, financial and educational exchanges, historical links and the presence in the countries in ASEAN region and beyond as the large Indian Diasporas have been living come under the cultural aspect of AEP.

Project 'Mausam' is in the boundary of it. It is the initiative of Ministry of Culture to be implemented by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) as the nodal agency with research support of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) and National Museum as associate bodies. This project aims to explore the multi-faceted Indian Ocean 'world' – collating archaeological and historical research in order to document the diversity of cultural, commercial and religious interactions in the Indian Ocean (MoC, 2018, para 1). Project 'Mausam' aims to re-connect and re-establish communications between countries of the Indian Ocean world, which would lead to an enhanced understanding of cultural values and concerns on the one hand and on the other the focus is on understanding national cultures in their regional maritime milieu. Since India is concerned at IOR, Project Mausam is in line with broader AEP policy. This Project Mausam is a multilateral programme consisted of 39

members states in which India has a stronger influence. The intensity of activities is covered during the Modi government as India has placed economic and cultural as well as strategic importance in IOR.

Project Mausam has central themes of identifying cultural routes and maritime landscapes that not only linked different parts of the Indian Ocean littoral but also connected the coastal centres to their hinterlands. More importantly shared knowledge systems and ideas spread along these routes and impacted both coastal centres, and also large parts of the environment.

From the cultural aspect of engaging across IOR countries so as to reconnect and rekindle long-lost ties and forges new avenues of cooperation and exchange, the Modi government give a priority of cultural engagement. As per the project, the significant step of recording and celebrating the important phase of world history from the African, Arab and Asian-world perspectives, India has its value adding in its regional balancer in IOR (MoC, 2019, para. 7).

The activities carried so far under Project Mausam are mostly in line with the Modi government's intent of engaging with littoral states so as to project nearness among the members. Some of the activities like publication titled Mausam: Maritime cultural landscapes across the Indian Ocean; lecture series on various themes related to project Mausam; an exhibition on "Africans in India: A rediscovery" in the IGNCA; conference on "Africans in India: A rediscovery"; national conference on the theme "Cultural landscapes and maritime trade routes of India" in Kerala; exhibition on "Unearthing Pattanam: Histories, Cultures and Crossings" at National Museum; conference on "the making of the Indian Subcontinent: Indian ocean perspective" at National Museum; an international conference on "Maritime routes and cultural landscapes" at Kancheri Caves, Mumbai; symposium on "Maritime

culture of India and its potential”; conference on Maritime Traditions of the Indian and Pacific Oceans at Kochi, Kerala; brainstorming session for creation of a database of Coastal sites at New Delhi etc. are on the one hand to make cultural linkages among different communities of people across countries and on the other fulfilling Indian presence so as to cover issues in the IOR. It broadly fulfills Indian AEP interest in the IOR.

As cultural engagement with ASEAN as well as rest of the region played important role in Indian AEP, diaspora diplomacy is the one among many areas Modi government has prioritized. The focus given to the the Indian diaspora, viewing them as agents of change, encouraging them to be a part of India’s growth story is very important regarding cultural engagement. The direct way of support by diaspora is remittance that the origin country receives from abroad. India was the world's largest recipient of remittances in 2016 having received \$62 billion. However, the importance of Diasporas does not end with remittances alone but extends to knowledge transfer, the sharing of resources, acting as unofficial Indian ambassadors and pushing for India's interests abroad. As India is the country having largest diaspora abroad, as it is counted as 16 millions as per the International Migration Report 2015.

Lobbying in international forums for Indian interests, promoting bilateral trade and cooperation, fostering ties regarding knowledge sharing and technology transfer, diaspora can play greater role as diaspora played ensuring the passage of the India-US Nuclear Deal in 2008. Similarly, Antonio Costa, the Portuguese Prime Minister, and Leo Varadkar, Ireland's Prime Minister are both belong to the Indian diaspora, and come from two economically strong countries that can trade with India. Portugal has already signed MOUs with India in science and technology, double taxation avoidance, space, trade and investment. Further, the two countries have agreed to create a joint science fund of four million Euros where they will collaborate in science research projects. As for Ireland and other countries like the

Netherlands with a large Indian diaspora, they are more likely to support India's interest in the global forums. Since Indian diaspora has their place in their respective countries, groups like the United States India Political Action Committee (USINPAC), Friends of India, Canada India Foundation (CIF) and Canada India Business Council (CIBC), are actively pushing for India's interests.

As a part of AEP, India has given focus to engage with diaspora by organizing several events and thereby engaging with the people of Indian origin. As stated in the website of Ministry of External Affairs, 'Know India Programme', 'Know Goa Programme', 'Scholarship Programmes for Diaspora Children', 'Indian Community Welfare Fund', 'Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra', 'Regional Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (RPBD)', 'Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Conferances', 'Indian Development Foundation of Overseas Indians', 'Pratisthit Pravasi' etc. are the engagements India has been carrying out under diaspora engagement.

India's interest to gain momentum in global affairs along with global position is marked on its cultural focus by which India is exercising its 'soft power'. Among various soft power assets of India, Yoga is a prominent one. The term yoga has broad and narrow connotations. It literally means to yoke or to add. According to Indian spiritual tradition, it implies union of the individual soul with the divine soul. As India is the centre of Yoga, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given special focus and engagement to expand the horizon of Yoga to be healthy on the one hand and on the other it is an iconic feature to sell in the global market so that it relates back to India. While introducing a proposal to celebrate yoga as an international event at the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Prime Minister Modi stated, "Yoga is an invaluable gift from our ancient tradition. Yoga embodies unity of mind and body, thought and action ... a holistic approach [that] is valuable to our health and our well-being" (UN, 2016, para. 1). According to the United Nations website, "yoga is an ancient physical, mental and spiritual practice that originated in India.

The word “yoga” derives from Sanskrit and means to join or to unite, symbolizing the union of body and consciousness ... International yoga Day aims to raise awareness worldwide of the many benefits of practicing yoga” (UN, 2016, para. 3).

One of the major recognitions of India’s soft power was the United Nations’ approval of 21 June as International Yoga Day. Internationally about 125 million people practice yoga. In 2016, on the yoga day at Dubai, led by Indian yoga guru, Baba Ramdev, 100,000 people participated, creating Guinness Book record.

India has its cultural linkages with almost all ASEAN countries. The Modi government wanted to boost its cultural linkages in considering Indian origin people across the globe, most importantly in ASEAN countries. India's cultural ties with ASEAN as well as rest region is intended to make deeper engagement as different innovative activities like the Singapore government and its leaders, such as organizing the 'India Fever', led to the revitalization of interest in Indian culture and economy. Former Foreign Secretary, now External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar highlighted the achievement of LE and AEP (Mishra, 2017, para. 5).

4.2.3 Diplomatic Engagement

Diplomacy is a tool of foreign policy. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given a heightened view towards diplomatic efforts for effective Act East Policy implementation. Since its commencement, there has been several high-level visits, meetings, participation in bilateral and multilateral forums. The frequency of visits and engagement in the diplomatic arena has helped India to present a strong posture which India, under Modi Leadership, has aspired for. Just after the announcement of Act East policy at East Asia summit in Myanmar in November 2014, Prime Minister articulated the vision in a very clear way by which India has made high morale at domestic front and at the same time it has made

India a good posture in the global arena. India's self-conception today of being a rising global power is drastically different than it was in the 1990s, as is many Indians' newfound desire to access global value chains and the spoils of global commerce (Editors, 2018, para. 3). The following table shows India's increased diplomatic engagement during the period of 2014-18 which can be considered the priority AEP has given.

Modi has also sought to rejuvenate ties with countries that have been neglected in earlier years, including Australia, which saw the first visit by an Indian prime minister in 29 years; Fiji (the first visit in 33 years) and Mongolia, which hosted the Indian prime minister for the first time ever (Ganapathi, 2015, p. 64).

India's priority to its 'Act East Policy' is observed from high-level visits to ASEAN and other countries in the region and hosting in response. In initial 2 years of Modi government, there were 9 out of 10 ASEAN states top-level visits from Prime minister, President and Vice President from India (Sajjanhar, 2016, para 7). This is equal to what M. Ganapathi points 'Act East' for its greater action and dynamism (2015, p. 67).

Diplomatic engagement from Indian part both as a host and a guest is important while analyzing AEP in diplomatic front. The team of Narendra Modi has hosted several heads of state, heads of governments and other officials on state, official and in working visits. Similarly, there have been several visits and engagements from Indian part. In order to see India's diplomatic engagement under Narendra Modi's 1st tenure of premiership, two way visits during the period of 2014 to May 2019 of the countries of AEP coverage is analyzed. Here, AEP coverage region means countries beyond ASEAN but India having interest to engage with under AEP.

Table 4
Diplomatic Visits from ASEAN and Extended AEP Coverage region to India
(2014-2019)

Date	Name of the Delegate and Designation	Country	Purpose	Remarks	
25-27 February, 2019	Marise Payne, Federal minister	Australia	Official Visit		
11-15 February 2019	AK Abdul Momen, Federal minister	Bangladesh	Official Visit		
24-28 January 2019	Mahathir Mohamad, PM	Malaysia	Guest at Republic Day of India		
20-28 January 2019	Pravind Jugnauth, PM	Mauritius	Guest at Republic Day of India		
8-11 July 2018	Moon Jae -in	South Korea	State Visit		
10-11 March 2018	Abdul Hamid, President	Bangladesh	International Solar Alliance Summit		
10-11 March 2018	Peter Cosgrove, Governor General	Australia	International Solar Alliance Summit		
4 March 2018	Tran Dai Quang, President	Vietnam	State Visit		
25-27 January 2018	Joko Widodo, President	Indonesia	Chief Guest of India Republic Day 2018 and ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit		
24-27 January 2018	Thongloun Sisoulith, PM	Lao PDR			
24-27 January 2018	Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha, PM	Thailand			
24-27 January 2018	Hassanal Bolkiah, Sultan	Brunei			
24-27 January 2018	Lee Hsien Loong, PM	Singapore			
24-27 January 2018	Rodrigo Duterte, President	The Philippines			
24-27 January 2018	Aang San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor	Myanmar		Chief Guest of India Republic Day 2018 and ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit	
24-27 January 2018	Hun Sen	Cambodia			
24-27 January 2018	Nguyen Xuan Phuc, PM	Vietnam			

3-6 July 2017	Pham Binh Minh, DPM	Vietnam	Official Visit	
26-28 May 2017	Pravind Jugnauth, PM	Mauritius	State Visit	
10-13 April 2017	Malcolm Turnbull, PM	Australia	State Visit	
7-10 April 2017	Sheikh Hasina, PM	Bangladesh	State Visit	
30 March- 4 April 2017	Najib Razak, PM	Malaysia	State visit	
12-13 December 2016	Joko Widodo, President	Indonesia	State Visit	
6-7 November 2016	Maithripala Sirisena, President	Sri Lanka	State Visit	
16 October 2016	Sheikh Hasina, PM	Bangladesh	BIMSTEC Summit	
16-19 October 2016	Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor	Myanmar	BIMSTEC Summit	
3-7 October 2016	Lee Hsien Loong, PM	Singapore	State Visit	
27-30 August 2016	Htin Kyaw, President	Myanmar	State Visit	
17-20 July 2016	Ahmad Zahid Bin Hamadi, DPM	Malaysia	Official visit	
16-18 June 2016	Prayut Chan-o-cha, PM	Thailand	State Visit	
19 May 2016	Frank Bainimarama, President	Fiji	Official Visit	
11-13 December 2015	Shinzo Abe, PM	Japan	Official Visit	
6-10 December 2015	Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, President	Mauritius	Official Visit	
25-27 August 2015	James Alix Michel, President	Seychelles	State Visit	
8-11 February 2015	Tony Tan, President	Singapore	State Visit	
19-12 January 2015	Sai Mauk Kham, Vice President	Myanmar	Official Visit	
27-28 October 2014	Nguyen Tan Dung, PM	Vietnam	State Visit	
4-5 September 2014	Tony Abbott, PM	Australia	State Visit	

26 May 2014	Navin Ramgoolam, PM	Mauritius	Swearing Ceremony of Narendra Modi	
25-27 January 2014	Shinzo Abe, PM	Japan	Official Visit	
15-18 January 2014	Park Geun – Hye, President	South Korea	State Visit	

Source: Ministry of External Affairs (2019)

During the period, India has hosted 15 state level visits. Similarly, she has hosted 16 heads of state and governments in swearing ceremony, summit meetings, and as Chief Guest of India Republic Day 2018 and ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit. This is especially from ASEAN and extended AEP region.

Similarly, India has given high value to diplomatic visits from Indian part. After the formation of new government in 2014, the diplomatic engagement has risen. The following table shows India's diplomatic engagement with ASEAN countries and the extended region under AEP.

Table 5
Diplomatic Visits from India to ASEAN and Extended AEP Coverage region (2014-2018)

Date	Country of Visit	Remarks
President's Visit		
December 10-14, 2018	Myanmar	Ram Nath Kovind
November 18-24, 2018	Vietnam and Australia	
March 11-14, 2018	Mauritius	
September 14-17, 2014	Vietnam	Pranab Mukherjee
Vice President's visit		
May 9-12, 2019	Vietnam	M. Venkaiah Naidu
March 6-7, 2017	Indonesia	Mohammad Hamid Ansari
February 03-05, 2016)	Thailand	
February 01-03, 2016	Brunei	
September 15-17, 2015	Cambodia	

November 1-4, 2015	Indonesia		
September 17-18, 2015	Lao PDR		
14-17 January, 2013	Vietnam		
Prime Minister's Visit			
June 27-29, 2019	Japan	Narendra Modi	
June 08-09, 2019	Maldives & Sri Lanka		
February 21-22, 2019	the Republic of Korea		
October 27-29, 2018	Japan		
November 14-15, 2018	Singapore		
May 29-June 2, 2018	Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore		
17 Nov, 2018	Maldives		
November 12-14, 2017	Philippines		
September 5-7, 2017	Myanmar		
May 11-12, 2017	Sri Lanka		
Nov 10 -12, 2016	Japan		
September 07-08, 2016	Lao PDR		
September 02-03, 2016	Vietnam		
Nov 21-23, 2015	Malaysia, Singapore		
Nov 23-24, 2015	Singapore		
June 6 - 7, 2015	Bangladesh		
May 18-19, 2015	Republic of Korea		
March 28 -29, 2015	Singapore		
March 10 -11, 2015	Seychelles		
March 11 -12, 2015	Mauritius		
Marc13 -14 h, 2015	Sri Lanka		
Nov 19, 2014	Fiji		
Nov 14-18, 2014	Australia		
March 3-4, 2014	Myanmar		
Aug 30 -3 Sept, 2014	Japan		
External Affairs Minister's Visit			
November 22-23, 2018	Lao PDR		
August 27-30, 2018	Vietnam and Cambodia		
May 10-11, 2018	Myanmar		
January 4-8, 2018	Thailand, Indonesia and		

	Singapore	Sushma Sworaj
March 28-30, 2018	Japan	
October 22-23, 2017	Bangladesh	
Aug 31-Sep 1, 2017	Sri Lanka	
Feb 05- 06, 2016	Sri Lanka	
Oct 10-11, 2015	Maldives	
June 27-29, 2015	Thailand	
Apr 21-24	Indonesia	
March 6-7, 2015	Sri Lanka	
Dec 28-30, 2014	Republic of Korea	
Nov 1-3, 2014	Mauritius and Maldives	
Aug 25, 2014	Vietnam	
Aug 15-17, 2014	Singapore	
Aug 08, 2014	Myanmar	
June 25-27, 2014	Bangladesh	
Feb 20, 2014	Maldives	

Source: Ministry of External Affairs (2019)

India has given high level of diplomatic dealings with ASEAN region. During the period of 2014- May 2019, India has made intensive engagement with ASEAN. As per Indian economic and strategic interest, India's diplomatic engagement is guided. Singapore and Vietnam hold high level of diplomatic visits in 11 times. This is because of Indian trade relations with Singapore and strategic relation with Vietnam. As per the Department of Commerce website, the total trade with Singapore and Vietnam stood 17.70 and 12.83 billion USD in the year 2017-18. In the same time, Khalid (2018, para. 8) sees Indian interest to engage more with Vietnam as "... India has forged closer military and business ties with some ASEAN members, including Vietnam, which has been at loggerheads with Beijing over the South China Sea". Similarly, India and Indonesia exchanged 7 high level visits during the period with whom the bilateral trade stood 20.40 billion USD which is the highest among

ASEAN countries. Likewise, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius also hold special relations in terms of diplomatic engagements. India's overall diplomatic engagement is guided as per its economic as well as strategic interest in the region. The value given to Singapore and Japan by Narendra Modi by visiting 5 and 4 times respectively is economically oriented.

India-ASEAN relation has valuable space for diplomatic efforts. As India's Act East Policy was unveiled at the 12th ASEAN-India Summit in 2014 held in Nay Pyi Taw, the major intent was obvious. In his Opening Statement on the occasion, Modi said: "A new era of economic development, industrialization and trade has begun in India and externally, India's 'Look East Policy' has become 'Act East Policy'." At this point of time, the 2nd Plan of Action (POA) or the 2010-2015 Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity, was in operation. This was adopted by the leaders of the ASEAN Member States and India at the 8th ASEAN India Summit held in Hanoi, Vietnam on 30 October 2010. This was followed by the 3rd POA or the 2016-2020 Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity. It aims to pursue the goals set forth in the POA for the next five years (2016-2020) and seeks to build on the achievements made in the implementation of the previous POA. Within this POA, the two sides had drawn a list of priority areas for the period 2016-2018. In his Opening Statement at the 14th ASEAN-India Summit, at Vientiane, Laos on 8 September 2016, Prime Minister Modi stated that "the ASEAN India Plan of Action for the period 2016-2020 has served us well in fulfilling our objectives. The 2016-2020 POA laid out three broad areas of cooperation; Political and Security Cooperation; Economic Cooperation and Socio-Cultural Cooperation. It provides a clear follow-up mechanism "to review the progress of implementation of the Plan of Action through the existing mechanism of the ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations" and provides for submission of progress reports on the

implementation to the annual ASEAN-Post Ministerial Conference with India (PMC+1 session) and the annual ASEAN-India Summit.

Earlier on 25 January 2018, New Delhi hosted the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit themed "Shared Values, Common Destiny", attended by the leaders of the ten ASEAN States. The Delhi Declaration was issued on this occasion, covering the entire spectrum of political-security, economic, socio-cultural and development cooperation. This was sought to be achieved through "further strengthening of relevant institutional mechanisms and broadening of the network between government institutions, parliamentarians, business circles, scientists, academicians, think-tanks, media, youth, and other stakeholders, for the building of a peaceful, harmonious, caring and sharing community in our regions." Modi had visited Singapore in June 2018 to attend the Shangri-La Dialogue, where he spoke about India's vision of the Indo-Pacific.

Giving diplomatic importance to ASEAN, India sent Mr. Suresh K. Reddy as the first Resident Ambassador to ASEAN on January 15, 2015, and the Mission started functioning from its new Chancery premises in Jakarta from January 2015 onwards. India set up its own ASEAN-India Centre, and for several years held the annual Delhi Dialogue conference.

India has been active in dealing with Southeast Asia's security architecture which comprises a system of overlapping institutions centered on ASEAN. This system has been evolving since the 1990s and consists of the ASEAN Regional Forum and Post-Ministerial Conference the East Asia Summit; dialogue mechanisms with ASEAN partners; the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and associated meetings, including ADMM+8; Track 1.5 meetings, the most prominent of which is the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore; and the Track 2 process, led by nongovernmental organizations, such as the annual Institute of Strategic and International Studies' Malaysia-led Asia-Pacific Roundtable in Kuala Lumpur.

India is an active participant in all of the ASEAN partnership mechanisms (Jonah Blank J. D., 2015, p. 55). Sixteen ASEAN-India Summits have been held since 2002, in addition to the latest Commemorative Summits to mark the 25th anniversary of the ASEAN-India Dialogue held on 25-26 January 2018 and the thirteenth East Asia Summit (Online, 2018, para 2-4).

India and ASEAN hold regular ministerial and senior officials' meetings, including meetings in the context of the Post-Ministerial Conferences between ASEAN and Dialogue Partners held at the annual ASEAN summits between ASEAN foreign ministers and each of the ten Dialogue Partners. The conferences review the relationship between ASEAN and the individual partners over the preceding years and set goals to promote cooperation in the future. The concept of an annual East Asia Summit developed as an evolution of the ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, and South Korea) mechanism, which had been operating since 1998. India was subsequently allowed to participate, along with Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Russia. For India, the invitation to join the East Asia Summit was recognition of its growing economic and political influence:

India's membership in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was the need observed by Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Singapore. The ARF is the primary forum for security dialogue in Asia and is led by regional foreign affairs leaders. It consists of 27 members: the ten ASEAN countries, the ten Dialogue partners (including India), plus Papua New Guinea, North Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, Timor Leste, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The ARF operates by consensus and aims to promote confidence-building among its members, develop preventive diplomacy, and provide coordinated disaster relief. India became a sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1992 and was upgraded to a full Dialogue Partner in 1996. Since 2002, India has participated in the annual ASEAN Summits, has co-chaired various ARF sessions, and has been a participant in the Shangri-La Dialogue at the ministerial level since the Dialogue's inception.

The annual ADMM, established in 2006, is the highest defense mechanism within ASEAN. For India, the ADMM Plus offers a vehicle to enhance its role as a stakeholder in the regional security architecture and, in particular, to reinforce its engagement in the maritime domain. Within the ADMM Plus, India's priority is to promote cooperative approaches to ensure the security of sea lines of communication in the Asia-Pacific region. At the 2010 meeting in Hanoi, Defense Minister A. K. Anthony reported that India was participating in two projects with countries bordering on the Malacca Strait to improve the safety of navigation. Engagement with ASEAN plus countries in the diplomatic sphere has economic as well as a strategic value which India wants to acquire under AEP (Jonah, 2015, pp. 55-56).

India has increased its diplomatic engagement and connectivity as per Act East Policy. Besides engagements with ASEAN related forums, India has been engaging with sub-regional forums with strong postures with leading roles. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and others are some sub-regional forums India has been giving diplomatic priority in the region so as to bolster economic ties on the one hand and on the other, these forums are very important for strategic balance India wants to have in the region.

In order to implement any policy, implementation plan along with programmes are essential. In the same, institutional mechanism play a vital role. To follow the line of Modi Government regarding Act East Policy, the government of Assam has opened a new Act East Policy Affairs Department. The World Bank has worked to create a Vision Report. Assam's Chief Minister has been following up on these 'Act East' projects personally (Prabir De R. a., 2017, para. 4). The focus given to establish and start to play role towards east is seen appreciable. The resources from centre government, as Minister C M Patowary heading Act

East Policy Department, in the field of connectivity to ASEAN countries via land and air is in progress as revival and upgrading of 55 airstrips across the state (Guha, 2018, para 6). Modi's visionary mind and eloquent speech play a strong role in public diplomacy in eastward connection. In most of his state visit, Modi tried to expand public diplomacy via diaspora linking which AEP sought to rejuvenate.

South Korean President Moon Jae in a maiden visit to India made a crucial point for India – South Korea partnership. Both countries committed to working out an important role in the ASEAN (Singh D. B., 2018, para 3). Both Countries had deliberated on bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interests.

India's diplomatic engagement in a series of the event has value in its AEP. In order to make engagement stronger and making economic and strategic benefits, these events are useful. Organizing and participating several summits and other events like Global Investors' Summit in Guwahati on 3rd February 2018, the year 2017 as a mark of completing 25 years of India-ASEAN dialogue partnership, 15th Annual ASEAN-India Summit in Manila in November 2017, the ASEAN-India Connectivity Summit in New Delhi in December 2017, the ASEAN-India Pravasi Divas (Indian Diaspora Day) in Singapore on 6-7 January 2018, visit of all the ASEAN member countries as a Chief Guest in India's Republic Day on 26th January 2018 etc. have special focus of making stronger engagement and thereby finding common place to go forward in Indian diplomatic engagement.

4.2.4 Strategic Engagement

Strategic scope is a vital aspect of Act East Policy. India by redefining the scope and coverage, clearly articulated its strategic intent in the region. Actively engaging with ASEAN countries, India is cooperating and engaging with countries in bilateral as well as multilateral ways especially where it finds space. As mentioned earlier distinguishing geographic scope of AEP, the strategic importance is drawn vis-à-vis its geographical extension from ASEAN

to South Asian and Asia-Pacific countries like Bangladesh to Japan, South Korea, Australia and even to the USA as it is a regional player in South East Asia.

Indian government especially the Modi government has given high priority to Maritime security and engagement with maritime countries. The priority has been made intensive so as India has China factor in the ASEAN region, more specifically in IOR and Asia-Pacific. In order to keep bilateral relations with maritime countries on the one hand and on the other strengthening inward development of islands and strategic bases are the top priority of India. In order to attain the strategic importance AEP sought for, India's diplomatic dealing and strategic partnership with countries from ASEAN block in both bilateral as well as multilateral; relations with Japan, South Korea, Australia and countries of Pacific islands have crucial meaning.

India has been worried for its maritime strategic value to be protected as the bulk of external trade is shipped by sea. India's vision to develop its blue economy also has a greater place in maritime resources. PM Modi said at the International Fleet Review in Vishakhapatnam on 7th February 2016 as the blue economy is the one by which can transform India. He said, "We want to build new pillars of economic activity in the coastal areas and in linked hinterlands through sustainable tapping of oceanic resources". PM Modi's intent was to focus on the goals like strengthening marine research, development of eco-friendly, marine industrial and technology base and fisheries (Affairs, 2016, para. 7).

In order to implement PM Modi's vision into reality, the National Institution for Transforming India, commonly called NITI Aayog, has been working as India's status as a maritime nation with a long coastline and the potential to become a significant blue economy (Singh M. , 2016, para. 4). Maritime imperatives have emerged as an essential element in India's internal development as well as external engagement strategies. In order to bolster its diplomatic relations with the maritime region so as to carry out the objectives of AEP, New

Delhi has intensified its efforts to engage with states in the Indo-Pacific region. PM Modi's diplomatic focus to these countries which were almost neglected earlier was the vein of AEP objectives. Comprehensive framework for India's maritime engagement which includes deepening security cooperation; building multilateral maritime security cooperation in the IOR; focusing on sustainable economic development for all; cooperating with extra-regional powers; and defending India's maritime interests are the focus Modi government (Chaturvedy, 2018, pp. 8-9). India has been reached out to 14 Pacific island countries, including Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa by expanding the geographic scope in order to attain strategic importance. In line with the maritime security expansion and making a stronger presence, Indian Navy's growing deployments in the Asia-Pacific region is another landmark of AEP towards strategic engagements. Indian Navy made single deployment in the Asia-Pacific region covering 4 countries with 4 ships in 2013 whereas it has increased 4 deployments with 7 ships covering 9 countries in 2015. The increased intensity to the 6 deployments with 17 ships covering 17 countries was the major strategic move Indian Navy has made so far under AEP toward Asia-Pacific Region (Singh A. , 2018, p. 5).

India is confidence in strategic engagement as it has already signed a strategic partnership with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Singapore, and ASEAN. Moreover, India has signed a nuclear deal in 2014 with Australia and with Japan in 2016 which has strategic meaning. The diplomatic dealings and strategic partnership with Indonesia have a special place in AEP. Making AEP more robust, India has been keeping its all sorts of efforts to be covered vis-à-vis Indonesia. In order to boost maritime security, which is a major area of engagement under AEP India wants to carry out in South East Asia and in IOR; the completion of joint air combat exercise; training sailors in submarine operations and agreeing to cooperate in defense manufacturing and to expand military-to-military cooperation is a great deal to India under AEP (Pant, 2017, para. 1).

In continuation and heightened bilateral relations, India and Indonesia further find space to co-work and partnership in multiple areas as both have signed 15 agreements, including one to boost defence cooperation and called for freedom of navigation in the strategic Indo-Pacific region during Prime Minister Modi's first-ever official visit to Indonesia on May 2018. On the occasion, both countries via joint statements expressed their willingness to make partnership even stronger and making new horizons of partnership. Narendra Modi's tweet expressed the momentum India and Indonesia ha reached for as "Held productive discussions with President Joko Widodo. Glad that ties between India and Indonesia are gaining strong momentum. We discussed areas of strategic cooperation, ways towards ensuring better economic ties and closer cultural relations between our nations," (PTI, 2018, para. 5). Further, both countries agreed to elevate their ties to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and made common understanding of India's Act East Policy and the vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region) matches Widodo's Maritime Fulcrum Vision.

Both countries, in the wake of urgency to make a stronger partnership, reaffirmed their commitment in the field of defence, with the signing of Defence Cooperation Agreement. The pact, a joint statement, will further strengthen and renew the existing cooperation for the mutual benefit of the two countries and the region. This is a strong point under Indian AEP as it has crucial space for strategic engagements India has been trying to carry out so that it can manage its relations with South East Asian countries and thereby make ease from Chinese influence and encircling. The way they agreed to further enhance mutual trust through regular meetings and staff talks between their armies, navies and air forces is another important point in India-Indonesia strategic partnership. Though India and Indonesia do not have direct claims in this dispute, both shared an understanding of making a common stance on the South China Sea as they “stressed the importance of resolving disputes by

peaceful means, in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including UNCLOS.”

Modi and Jokowi both want to engage as major maritime powers to ensure a stable maritime order in the region, one that is under stress because of China’s rapid rise and the United States’ growing reluctance under Trump administration. India has been worried about the security of the sea lanes of communication in the larger Indo-Pacific, Indonesia has been concerned about Chinese maritime intrusions near the Natuna islands, in waters which it claims as part of its exclusive economic zone, as well as Chinese attempts in the past to include parts of the island chain’s waters in its capacious territorial maps. In this ground, the India-Indonesia maritime relationship too has witnessed a significant upswing in the form of increased military delegation visits and training exchanges. The Indian Navy has upgraded its coordinated patrols outside the Strait of Malacca to a full-fledged naval exercise (Singh A. , 2018, p. 6).

As per the India-Indonesia strategic partnership, annual strategic dialogue by which India wants its AEP objectives to be fulfilled. Joint naval exercises, patrols, and regular port calls by their respective navies have become a regular feature of the India-Indonesia relationship in recent years. India has also become a major source of military hardware for Jakarta.

The cooperation between India and Indonesia is a natural result of geography. Indonesia’s location, combined with its naval forces, allow it to work effectively with India to ensure security in the sea lanes of communication between Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Together, they control the entry point from the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean to the Strait of Malacca. Further, Indonesia has invited India to help littoral states in the region maintain the strait’s security. New Delhi’s ambitious policy in East and Southeast Asia is aimed at significantly increasing its regional profile.

India's strategic efforts under AEP to link Japan's Democratic Security Diamond and the Asia Rebalance Strategy of the US work for good on India's part. Further, Indian involvement in Quadrilateral Security Dialogue along with the US, Japan, Australia is another landmark strategic response to Chinese influence (Worldview, 2017, para 8). During the 2017 ASEAN summit, all four parties rejoined the Quad and made it refreshed. Malabar Naval exercise in 2016 in which India, Japan, and the US jointly conducted the exercise near the disputed South China Sea is a strategic pressure to China showing unity among the stakeholders of the region (Sharma, 2017, para 9).

India- Australia relations also has strategic value under India's Act East Policy. India gave high priority as Prime Minister Narendra Modi took an official visit to Australia after 29 years. Indian concern and collaboration under AEP come to the same page when Australia identified India as a key defense and security partner in its 2016 Defense White Paper. Bilateral and multilateral naval exercises, nuclear deal in 2014 brought these two countries near so as to cooperate in strategic front considering mutual interest in rule-based international order in the Indo-Pacific region amid Chinese assertiveness.

Similarly, India –Vietnam relations have a special place of strategic value in AEP. India's defence outreach to Vietnam best illustrates India's strategic approach to Southeast Asia. As both sides upgraded their ties from strategic partnership to a comprehensive strategic partnership, it has strategic meaning towards regional alliancing, especially in maritime issues. As India gained membership of the Missile Technology Control Regime in 2018, India is favouring itself by exporting Brahmos missile, an Indo- Russian joint venture, to Vietnam. In addition to this, India extended a \$500 million line of credit to Vietnam to boost its defense preparedness by the purchase of 10 patrol boats and a project for the modernization of the Vietnam Navy's Petya class frigates (Sharma, 2017, para. 5). Further, Indian support to train Vietnamese submarines crews, for six new Kilo-class submarines

acquired from Russia. In return, Hanoi has permitted Indian warships to utilize its port facilities and also granted the Indian oil firm ONGC Videsh a two-year extension to explore a Vietnamese oil block in an area of the South China Sea contested by China and Vietnam.

Likewise, India-Philippines relations accounted for a valuable place in relation to strategic cooperation. The renewed relationship has cemented almost 40 bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding, alongside several rounds of mutual visits by top leaders, and people-to-people exchanges. Amidst the volatile geopolitical and strategic ambiguities in the Indo-Pacific region, New Delhi's expanding defense posture and economic success can provide prospects for shaping the balance of power in the region (Cabalza, 2018, para. 3). The improvement in maritime relations has been more gradual. Indian warships have visited the Philippines every year since 2006 which is a mark of India-Philippines relations. A goodwill visit by two Indian warships to Manila in October 2017 commemorating 25 years of the India-ASEAN dialogue partnership illustrates India's desire to remain engaged with Southeast Asian power.

In the same line with other ASEAN member states, Singapore holds a special position in India's AEP from economic as well as strategic scope. In the context of economic partnership, both are engaged in a bilateral way and on the strategic front, a closest maritime partner in the eastern neighbourhood. For long, the Singapore-India Maritime Exercise (SIMBEX) has been the Indian Navy's most productive maritime engagement in Southeast Asia. Besides upgrading the scope and complexity of individual exercises, India and Singapore have sought to enlarge the scope of SIMBEX beyond its traditional emphasis on anti-submarine operations. The 2017 iteration of the exercise explored other areas of operational cooperation, including advanced naval warfare drills, air defence exercises, and gunnery live firings, even witnessing the maiden participation of Singapore's F-15SG fighter.

Indian warships also joined in the Singapore Navy's Golden Jubilee celebrations, participating in both the inaugural International Maritime Review at Changi Naval Base and the International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference (Singh A. , 2018, pp. 6-7).

In order to secure strategic interest in Indian Ocean Region along with the Asia Pacific, India has been engaging more with Islands states. Modi government, in 2017, scrapped the Island Development Authority which was a body formed in 1986, with PM as Chairman. Though having Prime Minister's Chairmanship, the priority was not given properly. During the period, IDA hardly met dozens of time. Considering the strategic importance of the islands in Indian Ocean Region, Modi government reframed IDA as Islands Development Agency with more powers and result-oriented composition (Gokhale, 2018, para. 2). In the same line, India has focused to be self-empowered by upgrading infrastructure and military capabilities at its strategically located Andaman and Nicobar so as to project strategic imperative in the IOR. A trans-shipment terminal at Campbell Bay, which is less than 100 nautical miles from the western edge of Malacca Straits, a key sea lane of communication, is one of the Indian efforts to inward infrastructural military development. Strengthening capacity of four airports in Andaman and Nicobar is strategically oriented as it posed strategic importance in IOR. India's increased and intensive movement, resources funding and projects to be carried out in Lakshadweep as well, where construction of Minicoy Airport, modernization of existing Jetty at Kavarati and three tourism projects in Suheli, Minicoy and Kadamat are mostly intended to promote economic and strategic scope under AEP (Gokhale, 2018, para. 8). In order to expedite the developmental projects at the Andaman and Nicobar Island (ANI), the Modi government has appointed retired Navy Chief and Island Development Agency Chairman, Admiral D. K. Joshi, as the Lieutenant Governor of the Union Territory intends to fulfill the intention of islands' capacity to play a military-strategic role (Times, 2017, para. 5).

PM Modi visit and interaction with the 12 leaders and representatives of the Pacific Islands in 2014 as a breakthrough in 33 years which shows Indian interest to be engaged and make strategic ties stronger. Prime Minister Modi's visit to Fiji in 2014 and the creation of the India-Pacific Islands cooperation Forum, India has sought to raise its economic and security engagement in the region. Further by signing a defence pact with Fiji, India underlined its stakes in areas of maritime security and naval cooperation in the Pacific region (News, 2017, para. 1).

India, as it aims at having global roles, tries to find more space by aligning India's Act East Policy near with the U.S. pivot to Asia through the Joint Strategic Vision, India seeks to expand its geo-strategic space to contend with China's growing assertiveness and foster balanced relations. Jhinuk Chowdhury, a freelance journalist of The Huffington Post finds Indian 'Act East Policy' to manage China as it draws India closer to Japan and Australia in the Pacific and to other small Southeast Asian nations most of which have contending territorial claims with China (2016, para. 7).

India stood as a firm stand regarding maritime disputes in the region with the philosophy of articulating its principled position of freedom of navigation, maritime security, expeditious resolution of dispute according to international law and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, developing a Code of Conduct, and settlement through dialogue and peaceful means. India is concerned because more than 40 percent of its trade passes through the South China Sea, and on account of its interest in harnessing fossil resources in the region. Indian strategic role is important to play a soft-balancing role to manage the rise of China in the region. Strategic partnership with Japan, Australia, and Vietnam is all intended to make stronger alliances so that it could minimize Chinese influence.

Not being specific to any sorts of engagement previously mentioned, India's Act East Policy has its implications to countries like Nepal as India has stated its interest to connectivity in the region. However, the engagements in economic sphere along cultural ties and thereby maintaining relations is worthy in the changed context of Indian Foreign Policy. Further, India has made its specific focus shift from the organization South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) due to its minimal functionality and considering difficulty in unity among the states. In an alternative, India has revived its engagement with Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and regional sub grouping of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN).

Illustrating the role of BIMSTEC, Preeti Saran, Secretary (East) in the External Affairs Ministry of India said that BIMSTEC is important for India in terms of New Delhi's Act East Policy and Neighbourhood First Policy, with northeastern India acting as a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia (2018, para. 1). Since India, under Narendra Modi's premiership, the word connectivity has been a buzzword which has been frequently used. 3 Cs namely Connectivity, Commerce and Culture has been given priority. Such connectivity could be a major landmark for landlocked countries like Nepal as Saran (2018, para. 5) further said, "Connectivity is an important component of our discussions within BIMSTEC. There are two landlocked countries (Nepal and Bhutan) and for them access to water is very important,"

India has signed the multilateral landmark Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) for the Regulation of Passenger, Personnel and Cargo Vehicular Traffic along with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh on June 15, 2015. This is a major initiative which will pave the way for a seamless movement of people and goods across the borders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and

Nepal (BBIN) in order to boost economic activities, leading to regional integration and development.

As connectivity is one of India's keen areas of interest to mobilize BIMSTEC is important, multimodal transport connectivity as a part of Indian move towards connectivity by road, rail and air will be a major landmark. A study by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) proposed 10 regional road networks as South Asian Corridors (SAC), out of which seven have been identified in the BBIN region. The land-locked trading centres of Nepal and Bhutan can get access to ports in India and Bangladesh. The idea is to link the South Asian Corridors with the Asian Highway network. Panda (2018, para. 19) sees India's active engagement with BBIN and BIMSTEC is a part of India's Act East policy and could eventually replace the ineffective SAARC initiative.

As BIMSTEC leaders, in Summit held in Kathmandu in 2018, have made their joint commitment towards a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable development in Bay of Bengal region through collective efforts. They also recognized poverty, connectivity, terrorism, transnational organized crime, environment & disaster management and climate change as the greatest regional challenges. BIMSTEC priority is again proved in Modi's 2nd term swearing programme in which the participation from the leaders of the BIMSTEC member states in New Delhi on May 30, India has signaled the priority it will give to this regional grouping in its foreign policy in the coming years.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

India under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi took the shift of earlier LEP to AEP has gone through multiple interactions between and among agencies and states. Serious and intensive diplomatic dealings with two-way high-level visits, engaging in bilateral as well as multilateral forums in a more intensive way have been made during the period along with cooperation and strategic partnership with ASEAN as well as to extended neighbourhood. Series of high-level visits from the head of the government has built a new height of confidence in domestic front which is the primary success of the Modi government. By this, the projection to global affairs, maintaining stance in bilateral and multilateral negotiations, and the view towards India from other actors of regional as well as global sphere has been changed. Further, the shift of LEP to AEP diversified its focus from the single horizon of the economy to multiple horizons of economic, socio-cultural and strategic sphere and it has made national unity among parties and stakeholders back at home. This eventually made India under AEP stand with stronger posture.

The expansion of geographic scope in AEP has brought strategic as well as economic benefits back at home. Bilateral relations with Japan, South Korea, and Australia and even with the US have been renewed. The priority given to the littoral states has a strategic meaning which AEP tried to seek as an expansion of geographic coverage in which countries like Australia and other countries in Asia-Pacific were not given appropriate priority earlier.

Another special focus given under AEP is inward focus to infrastructure development is very important. The Northeastern part of the country especially states like Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Sikkim, West Bengal, Arunachal etc. have been left far behind the par. The Modi government has placed Northeastern states at the heart of AEP from where its

geographic relation with ASEAN via Myanmar starts. As India has placed 3Cs namely culture, connectivity, and commerce at the centre of AEP, the focus given to the infrastructural development and thereby land and air connectivity to ASEAN countries via Bangladesh and Myanmar is another successful attempt. In addition to this, the efforts under Sagarmala Programme and Project Mausam has been placed at high priority as it aimed at modernizing and upgrading maritime trade, commerce, security, and cultural tools. The engagement and activities/projects under Project Mausam and Sagarmala will have two-fold benefits i.e. it makes India strong in its internal part and on the other it will boost its trade, culture, and security in the region. Further, the establishment of Act East Department is a genuine start from the Assam government which probably is an icon under AEP.

Bilateral and multilateral engagement is another positive point the Indian government has been carried out during the period of AEP. India-ASEAN relations has crossed 25 years of partnership and several mechanisms, dialogue forum is going on in which India has been playing leadership roles in most of the occasions. Further, India has established a special resident mission to ASEAN so as to engage diplomatically. India has increased strategic relations with countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines which have some sort of contest with China. India has been very anxious and alert of Chinese influence in its backyard. India's stand-in freedom of navigation and peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea and in Indian Ocean Region has made strategic proximity with Japan's Diamond Security policy, South Korea's Southern Policy and the US's Asia Pivot policy. This made India under the safe and alliancing sphere of strategic importance.

India has maintained its bilateral relations active with countries in the region and beyond. India's nuclear deal with Japan and Australia, the supply of Brahmos missile to Vietnam, capacity building of marine sailors of Vietnam and formation and involvement of Indian Ocean Rim organization are strategically important. In the same line, land boundary

agreement with Bangladesh and Myanmar and continuation of infrastructural projects like Kaladan Multimodal Highway and Trilateral highway will help to be connected with South East Asia especially with ASEAN and thereby boosting trade, commerce and culture.

Though AEP has sought high-level diplomatic efforts along with economic and strategic engagement with ASEAN countries and more in the extended region of Asia-Pacific, there are some limitations India has been facing on the ground. The constraints of AEP varied. It is in structural limitation as well as developmental efforts.

In order to attain the objectives of AEP, India should be more engaged in inward development of North Eastern states as this region is at the heart of AEP. Promoting the development of India's impoverished northeastern states, which has been facing a number of logistical handicaps in its development infrastructures such as electricity, communication, transportation, banking, and finance are irregular and unevenly distributed among urban and rural areas, is the key objectives of the Act East Policy. In order to boost developmental activities along with trade in the northeastern states, India has been trying to connect these states to ASEAN via Myanmar. But the physical progress of proposed Kaladan Multimodal Transport project, which connect the Indian port city of Kolkata in West Bengal with the port of Sittwe in Myanmar's Rakhine state and Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway which connect Moreh in Manipur province with Tak province in Thailand, providing an overland trade route into Southeast Asia is not progressing as expected.

Further, though India has placed the primary position of its northeastern states, the region also faces the challenge of illicit drugs and arms trade. The region falls under the shadow of the hub of heroin-based trade from Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. Porous borders, coupled with populations of same ethnicity living on both sides of the boundary make it difficult to contain the peril. As India seeks to expand its economic presence in Southeast Asia and beyond, the difficulties of securing greater market access and the slow pace of

infrastructure development will limit its role for greater trade relations as it faces regional and internal security challenges in South Asia.

China's regional expansion in the Asia-Pacific will make a way to continue India into a security alliance with the United States and Japan as a part of its AEP, barriers to market access and thereby limiting the Indian trade with ASEAN are the result of Indian impediments on fiscal and project management (Worldview, 2017, para. 9). Similarly, increased engagement with ASEAN countries in both bilateral as well as multilateral way is positive and a major point under AEP. However, India has been involving only on the surface level. The trade between India and ASEAN is not in favour of India in which India is in deficit with most countries. Though the trade with ASEAN has grown the same trade of ASEAN and China is far more than the India-ASEAN. India has been under regular trade deficit with ASEAN countries as well as with China. Further, India is reluctant in Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which was announced by ASEAN in 2012. There have been a series of trade negotiations, summit-level meetings regarding RCEP in which India has its concerns on 'Rules of Origin' and 'Free flow of Services (Manpower)' to RCEP countries.

The recent trade negotiation, 26th round of negotiation, from 22 June to 03 July in Melbourne, Australia, has finalized seven of the 18 final RCEP agreement chapters have been concluded during the period of 6 years. This is taking too long time as it is crucial for the Indian part due to its concerns as India's trade deficits have only grown with each country it has an FTA with, and already has deficits with 11 of the 15 other RCEP countries including with China (\$ 63 billion), South Korea (\$11.96 billion), Indonesia (\$ 12.47 billion) and Australia (\$10.16 billion) (Singh U. B., 2018, para. 13). As a result, the Modi government has been cautious about moving ahead. For India, this is a very crucial as it aimed to have a deeper engagement with ASEAN on the one hand and on the other India has several concerns

of strategic and security issues in which India cannot leave the ground. This will further elevate stagnation between India and ASEAN whereas Chinese influence may increase and may lead to either partial camping or pressure to India to adopt. Both can be hazardous to India.

Similarly, Indian orientation to check Chinese influence in the region by engaging with ASEAN countries on various forums is relatively less in comparison with China. China-ASEAN trade is greater than India-ASEAN. Similarly, China has more military and security tools and technology than later. China has both bilateral as well as a multilateral presence with almost countries India has been engaging with. So, the impact of engaging will serve its intent or not is a challenging question for now and in the future as well. When India got admission in ASEAN Regional Forum in 1996, China got the same. In the same, New Delhi's accession to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and Commencement of Free Trade Negotiations with ASEAN in 2003, China did the same shortly after. Membership in the EAS of both countries, how effective India's engagement will be in the presence of China (Bajpae, 2018, para 8-10). A simple example that shows India has to do a lot so as to secure its intended objectives is China-Myanmar trade and relations. Myanmar is placed in an important status in AEP as India's Former President Pranav Mukharjee in his visit to Myanmar in August 2016 mentioned Myanmar as a gateway to ASEAN in which both countries could work together in achieving the shared vision of stability, peace, and progress in the region (Tai, 2017, para 6). But this has not been as it aspired for. India did not even rank among the top five countries by foreign investment in Myanmar in 2016. China's growing presence casts a shadow on India-Myanmar relations. As of March 2017, China remained Myanmar's largest foreign investor, with permitted enterprises value at over \$18.5 billion, a figure that eclipses India's total investment of \$2 billion. India's engagement is new with Myanmar in comparison to China. Before the implementation of the LEP, China

enjoyed a monopoly over Myanmar's vast oil and natural gas reserves. Though India has boosted its maritime cooperation with Myanmar, still China remains Myanmar's biggest weapons supplier. In this pretext, India has to do a lot not only in Myanmar but also in other ASEAN states so as to cover its aspired objectives under AEP.

Another constraint for AEP is that India has its primary focus with ASEAN but a lack of unity among them could limit India's role in the region and this would give further advantage to China to set the regional agendas. Further, ASEAN was always less effective in fractious political issues. The division among members has become deeper when it comes to China. It is not clear that ASEAN will be able to act in a united manner when it comes to the South China Sea or on matters relating to China (Rajagopalan, 2018, para. 3). India has no good option to deal with the problem of divided ASEAN, but probably recognition to stress additional platforms like BIMSTEC. In the same line, India-China relation also plays a major role in India's presence in the ASEAN region. As India has both competitive as well as cooperative relations, India also has several multilateral alliances with China by which India may turn reluctant to provoke China as per US interest. This, in turn, may disturb Indo-US-Japan security alliance in the region.

Though Indian priority towards strategic objectives of AEP via maritime engagement and expansion is great and has played a decisive role in India's strategic outreach, Indian Navy's share in India's defence budget is not only low but has been decreasing for the past few years. Comparison of the budget share allocation for the year 2018-19 with 2010-11 shows that budget allocation to the Navy has come down from 18% of the total defence budget to 15%. Though the budget share of the army has increased from 50% to 55% at the same time, the aspired objectives of AEP on the maritime front may be difficult to attain (Marjani, 2018, para. 11). It seems India is doing differently than it is saying.

Though India has its stand of peaceful settlement of disputes, as per international law and governance over contested lands in the South China Sea and trade pass in the Indian Ocean, rule-based order in the South China Sea and ensuring freedom of navigation in the Malacca Straits and Indian Ocean are still crucial to India's strategic interests and have to follow eternally. China understands the strategic move India is playing in the IOR as India and the US both are better placed because of different reasons. In order to bolster her presence in the IOR, China has initiated a policy of seeking naval facilities and strategic partnership with the littoral states surrounding India. Since China has maritime disputes with all neighbours in the Pacific Ocean, the strategic maritime collaboration is being cultivated in with the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. Under this strategy, China has availed naval facilities at Gwadar in Pakistan, electronic gathering facilities on islands in Bay of Bengal, port facilities in Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Chittagong in Bangladesh, naval bases in Myanmar, funding of the construction of canal across the Kra Isthmus, signing the military agreement with Cambodia and so on. As Pakistan is a strategic ally and all-weather friend of China, who is building a road and rail link from Gwadar to mainland China through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), this may hamper India's interest in IOR and Asia- Pacifica along with ASEAN region.

Though PM Narendra Modi government has been actively engaging in the diplomatic sphere, there are some concerns about the value of this diplomacy whether it is attaining its implied objectives or not. Initially, the Modi government advocated 'Neighbourhood First' policy which was observed in his coronation in 2014 by inviting all the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) members and regional leaders to his inauguration and triumphantly proclaimed a neighborhood first policy. In pursuance of that, he visited Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. Yet, the results have been disappointing, to say the least. So, there is a difference in policy advocacy and implementation.

India's AEP may find its scope in China's belligerence in the South China Sea as an opportunity for closer cooperation with the littoral states that have competing territorial claims in that area. But the way the Philippines turned away from Indian advocacy and support towards its case on the court of Tribunal as the Philippines turned its hand to China. Advocacy and diplomatic dealing for freedom of navigations and peaceful settlement of disputes would require very bold but nimble diplomacy to knit together a loose alliance of nations from Japan all the way down to Australia.

India's efforts to have cultural linkage with the diaspora is not that much easy and applicable than it is assumed for. Though it has value for cultural promotion and linking the communities, it does not support to achieve its AEP directly to project India's great power ambitions.

5.2 Conclusion

India's upgrade of its earlier LEP to AEP in November 2014 during the East Asia Summit in Nay Pi Taw; Prime Minister Narendra Modi has articulated the scope and significance different than the previous one. During the period of 5 years of his premiership, PM Narendra Modi and his team have intensively advocated and enforced the changed policy into practice.

India has changed its foreign policy priorities as it has to fulfill its geographic and strategic interest in the region. Indian efforts of engagements and engagements are seen in line with economic, cultural and strategic front so as to cover its aforementioned interests. In order to carry out the objectives of deeper engagement with South East Asia especially with ASEAN Countries, the Indian government has carried out several diplomatic efforts along with engagement, interactions in bilateral as well as multilateral forums. Increment in

intensity and difference in approach is visible. By this, India has renewed its bilateral relations in economic as well as strategic front with ASEAN countries as well as the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean Region. New partnerships in economic, cultural and strategic scope have been made during the period. Some intensive focus like engagement with ASEAN by providing resident Ambassador and implementation of AEP by Sikkim Government's establishment of Act East Department is seen as a plus point of AEP.

India has positively oriented toward inward development of Northeastern states with infrastructural development like roads and highways; modernization of islands like Andaman and Nicobar with strategic interests and launched programmes like Sagarmala and Project Mausam so as to enhance inward capabilities for growth and development on the one hand and on the other, making ease for trade and commerce and thereby present in a valid and authentic posture in regional security and economic architecture especially in IOR and in Asia-Pacific.

Indian move toward regional engaging via institutions and grouping like ASEAN, MGCs, BIMSTEC, BBIN, IO RIM, CLMV, QUAD, etc. has played significant roles in attaining AEP objectives. India has maintained its engagement with ASEAN as an organization in a multilateral way and with a bilateral way with different member states.

India has renewed its bilateral relations with ASEAN Members as well as Japan, South Korea, Australia, other littoral states of IOR and Asia-Pacific by economic and cultural, diplomatic, and strategic engagement. India has made a nuclear partnership with Australia and Japan and a strategic partnership with Vietnam as a new paradigm in India's new foreign policy initiative. India has been active for promoting its trade and commerce via land and air connectivity with South East Asian countries.

Despite India's various initiatives and frequent engagements with the stakeholders in the region, there are some spaces by which Indian efforts are made less effective. India's 'acting' orientation through AEP, though has increased its engagement on various fronts, has neither India's trade with ASEAN is in favour nor its trade with China as both trade is deficit to India. Further, China has favourable status with both India and ASEAN trade. Further, Chinese engagement with ASEAN and each member states is equally pessimistic to India for its AEP target. China's role and influence have played a detrimental effect on India's presence in the ASEAN region along with IOR and Asia-Pacific. China's strong posture and relations with ASEAN in terms of economic as well as strategic power and its interests in the ASEAN region has limited India to acquire its intent via AEP. As India has its interests in the region, the same is China's case. In this context, India has no other option than engaging more than the previous engagement. So continuing deeper engagement, making partnership even stronger and forging balance in the region is the crux India should follow.

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