International Relations · GS - II

Evaluate the economic and strategic dimensions of India's Look East Policy in the context of the post Cold War international scenario.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
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MARKS	WORD LIMIT
12.5	~200 words

Answer Hint

Look East Policy; ASEAN; post-Cold War order; trade and investment; connectivity; maritime security; Act East Policy; Indo-Pacific

Model Answer

Introduction

India's Look East Policy, initiated in the early 1990s, sought to deepen engagement with Southeast Asia after the Cold War and India's economic reforms. It combined economic integration with strategic outreach.

Economic Dimensions

- **Trade and investment:** Engagement with ASEAN expanded opportunities for trade, investment and regional production networks.
- **Economic integration:** India's participation in regional frameworks strengthened links with East Asian markets.
- **Connectivity:** Cooperation on roads, ports and cross-border transport aimed to connect India's Northeast with Southeast Asia.
- **Tourism and services:** Greater mobility and business interaction created opportunities in tourism, education and professional services.
- **Regional development:** Connectivity and market access offered potential benefits for India's northeastern states.

Strategic Dimensions

- **Maritime security:** Engagement with Southeast Asian countries supported cooperation in maritime safety and freedom of navigation.
- **Defence relations:** Joint exercises, defence dialogue and capacity-building improved strategic partnerships.
- **Balancing regional power:** Stronger relations diversified India's partnerships amid China's growing regional influence.
- **Multilateral engagement:** India's participation in ASEAN-led forums enhanced its role in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific.
- **Eastern outreach:** Relations with countries such as Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia strengthened India's regional presence.

Challenges

Trade deficits, slow infrastructure development, non-tariff barriers and uneven implementation of connectivity projects have constrained outcomes. Regional rivalries and differences among partner countries also complicate cooperation.

Evolution into Act East

In 2014, India elevated the policy into the Act East Policy, emphasising implementation, strategic cooperation and stronger regional connectivity.

Conclusion

The Look East Policy helped integrate India into East Asian economic and strategic networks. Sustained connectivity, balanced trade, reliable project delivery and deeper people-to-people ties remain essential to realising its full potential.

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