

## **India's Look East Policy and the Northeast: Challenges ahead**

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Since the early 1990s, India has been seeking to situate the country's troubled Northeast at the heart of what eventually evolved into its so-called 'Look East' policy. For India, using the Northeast region to link up with the East Asian economies holds an allure similar to that of icing on a cake: it could end the long decades of isolation for the remote region and turn it into a strategic bridge giving India access to the East. The end of the region's multiple insurgencies and violent homeland agitations that led to militarization eating into vital resources that could be more gainfully used for development, is a prospect welcomed by any regime in Delhi: success in conflict resolution in an area 'that looks less and less India and more and more like the highlands of South-east Asia'. The fate of the Northeast appears inextricably tied to the Look East policy, especially in the coming days. Increased trade and connectivity will rapidly transform the region by rescuing it from the clutches of insurgency, ethnic conflict and sub-nationalism, and place it in the broader network of power, capital and markets. This stream of activities would supposedly make the multiple fault lines of the region disappear.

However, prior to raising our expectations about the often termed 'troubled periphery', let's first understand the complications and impediments in Northeast India. With this backdrop, this paper focuses on the considerable hurdles and limitations encountered in carrying forward India's 'Look East' through Northeast policy and especially looking the problems caused by the nature of physical terrain, ethnic variations, the history of violent conflicts in the region, the poor state of transport infrastructure and local industries in Northeast India through which India has to access other ASEAN countries by land.