

India's Act East policy: A study of Andaman and Nicobar perspective

Dipankar Dey

P.G. Student , Department of politics and International Studies
Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India
Email - dipankard833@gmail.com

Abstract: *A Study of the Act East policy has been one of the instruments of India's foreign policy. Hence, this article has accumulated the ideas and significant role of Andaman and Nicobar islands towards India's foreign policy of futuristic mechanism. For this purpose, the Indian Ocean always predominantly played an important role in terms of hard powers and soft powers ascendancy, and it extends the geopolitics interest in this region attracted to the other nation-state. The Andaman and Nicobar can play a greater role in the interest of tourism, culture, marine resources, biodiversity, strategic location and it creates the new gateway of a maritime economic corridor to counter the Chinese presence in this region. This article argued that how would Andaman and Nicobar Islands play a role of greater game changer? And how India's foreign policy looking towards the islands is soft power and hard power mechanism? Therefore, this article raises the basic questions that how the islands make the future geopolitics theatre in the South Asian region.*

Key Words: *Act East Policy, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Hard Power, Soft Power, Geopolitics, Indian Ocean, South Asia.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

From the beginning of NDA Government led by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Foreign Policy has been impartial dynamism to world politics. As per the Act East Policy, the updated version of Look East Policy to India's Foreign Policy instrument, the initiative was taken by the then Narashima Rao Government, and this was proceeded by the Vajpayee Government and furthermore made a similar progression under Manmohan Singh government. In the November 2014, Modi Government took a significant decision to look into the neighbourhood first policy and upgrade the existing policy from "Look East Policy" to "Act East Policy" for the quickly developing extension of social advancement, political collaboration, monetary participation, networks, and military commitment connection with Southeast Asia and South Asia countries. India's Act East Policy is largely concentrated on the economic collaboration, cultural ties and develops a strategic partnership with countries in the Indo-Pacific region through constant engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. However, in the sense of maritime security and strategic of Geo-politics India's act east policy has also actively participated in regional forum such as Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Further, in the process of globalization and newly emerging of regional power has led to strategic imperative and incorporate to the marine politics, whereas India's foreign policymakers have more concentration at the lands based engagement rather than the Blue-economic platform. It has to be an argument that China attitude towards the growing interest and presence in the Indian Ocean region. Apart from this India having a good strategic location in the Bay of Bengal situated Andaman and Nicobar archipelago to measure strengthening defence and securing India from Chinese's naval power. The Andaman and Nicobar islands are geographical far away from the mainland. This island chains consisting of 572 islands where only 36 islands are inhabited incorporate to Andaman and Nicobar Islands divided by the 10-degree channel. (Khurana, 2006)¹ stated that "the A&N contributes about 30 per cent of the EEZ to India's total EEZ area" it should be a clear idea that a & n islands to play a greater role in the exploiting India's Indian ocean resources up to 200 nm dimension and his domination of the Indo-Pacific region. Is India's act east policy bearing in mind of A&N islands including in part of neighbourhood policy? Whether there is any significant contribution with regard to economic cooperation, people to people contact and developed a strategic relationship with across the indo-pacific regions?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The volume of existing literature attempt to clarify the ambiguity of the present research area, in such way some of the literature was taken on the review. (Rajendram, December 2014)² he points out India's strategy of external and internal policy has been balancing against China but has also been motivated by India's desire for a greater global role and its rise as a trading nation. He describes the policy had moved towards the further objectives of India's foreign policy during the Modi regime to reinforce the relevance of India's role in the East and Southeast Asia. Although he primarily expressed the Modi government has the intention to focus on relations with India's South Asian neighbours,

its commitment to pursue economic growth. (Kaul, 2015, pp. 146-171)³ he analyses the tourism can attract people from abroad then only we can reach the Indian Ocean region. However, it would be displayed as a soft power projection in the Bay of Bengal. He argued that tourism as a weapon of soft power can be used to complement the military power. On the other hand, he attempts that the islands have large EEZ to guard against poachers, pirates, non-state actors; as a result, the strategy of tourism development with security and environmental sustainability in mind needs to be evolved. He finally points out that India needs the leverage of soft power. (Khurana, 2006)¹ he mentioned that Andaman and Nicobar islands had long neglected due to its remote location, and some of its islands he refers 'slipping away' from the Indian dominion. Further, he suggested that the island chain can now play a greater role towards securing India's vital interests in the east beyond merely protecting India's national interest. Khurana suggested that India needs to adopt a two-fold approach – first, he augments its intrinsic capabilities, and second, actively engage its maritime neighbours.

3. OBJECTIVES:

- To the analysis of potential islands' powers that can be utilized on the Act East Policy instrument of India's foreign policy.
- The understanding of Andaman and Nicobar Islands' strategic importance and reserves a huge number of resources can play a greater role in world politics.

4. METHODOLOGY:

The study was conducted in a various analytical method which has been based on secondary data and observations. The secondary data is collected from various research article, magazines, books, websites, newspapers, etc. The research methods have constructed on the qualitative in nature and normative inquiry of investigation raising the issue in such a way that the conclusion is implied.

5. ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ARCHIPELAGO:

Andaman and Nicobar Islands are consisting of groups of 572 islands at the south-eastern edge of the Bay of Bengal, only 36 islands are inhabited. The A & N islands having a total population as per the 2011 census is approximately 3.81 Lakh with the cover of 8,249 Sq/ Km. The northern part (Diglipur) of A & N islands is only 18 Km from Myanmar's Coco islands and its southern part (Indira Point) is located only 160 km away from the northern edge of Sumatra (Indonesia) (see map 1). Further, the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the sea, 1982 mentions that the jurisdiction of 200nm of ocean space in terms of EEZ in which the A & N sharing the total 30 % of the Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) to India. There is a no doubt that India's strategic interest towards the Indo-Pacific regions through the Act East Policy, A & N archipelago plays a significant centric role in the maritime strategic relationship with the Southeast Asia and East Asia nations.



Map: 1 Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Source: <http://www.thenorthlines.com/nicobar-iaf-base-indian-ocean-strategic-asset-liability/>

6. POWER SHIFTED FROM GLOBAL TO REGIONAL POLITICS:

The expansion of power shifted from bipolarity to unipolarity world and at just the beginning of the 21st century, the power politics shifted towards the multipolarity domains. Obviously, Regional Power has been a major factor for the hegemony shift from superpower to regional power such as SAARC and ASEAN etc., for this reason, a large number of developed countries has been depended on the developing countries in a sense of natural resources exploitation and market economy, on the other hand, India needs to play for proper salvation of A & N archipelago to bear substantial hydrocarbon reserves, timber and high potential export of seafood production. (Mukherjee, May 2016)⁴ He suggested that India should be striving for the new “infrastructure development in the islands including ports, roads and other facilities—like a cold storage chain for development of fisheries”. In the process of LPG (liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation) we need to strengthen our isolated pocket area and attendant the long term consequences of maritime trades in the Indo-Pacific Region.

7. A NEW GATEWAY OF ECONOMIC CORRIDOR OF SOUTHEAST ASIA:

India is presently the sixth largest economy in the world and According to the World Bank accounted for approximately 7.3 % of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the fiscal year 2018-2019. However, India-ASEAN trade and investment relations have been growing gradually, with the opening of US\$ 81.33 billion, which is approximately 10.6% of India's total trade and export at 11.28% of our total exports with ASEAN. Above the mention statistical data showing that India's trade and investment rapidly increasing in terms of an initiative of BIMSTEC, Mekong Ganga Cooperation and Free Trade Areas etc. in the past few decades, China increased their trade capacity with exports reached 279.1 billion U.S. dollars in 2017, where almost trade moving by sea lines. There are major arguments that India having well trading routes through the Andaman Sea to Strait of Malacca, would be growing the future investment. (Kumar, 2016)⁵ He argued in his article that the “India has been exhorting Asean members to participate in "Make in India", "Digital India", "Skill India" and "Smart Cities" projects” which is inherently seeking investments in infrastructure, manufacturing, trade, agriculture, skill development and urban renewal with ASEAN member states. The recent development of India's Act East policy can promote the maritime trade route with the initiative of “Gateway of Economic Corridor”. Perhaps, (United News of India, July 8, 2018) the Andaman Chamber of commerce & industry representatives visited the Sumatra to interact with the Provincial Government of Aceh and North Sumatra on the potentials of co-operation between Aceh & North Sumatra. It has been shown that both countries' relationship promotes at a greater level throughout the tourism, people to people contact, and B to B linkage between two nations.

8. STRATEGIC OUTLOOK:

It would create more potential, that India's act east policy counters the China presence on the Indian Ocean region. In the name of “String of Pearls” strategy refers to China's constructing of ports in Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Chittagong in Bangladesh and Sittwe in Myanmar, but these ports have been ultimately threatening to security and strategic consequences for India sovereignty. Whereas, India created its first joint command on A & N islands in 2003 called the Andaman and Nicobar Joint Command for the protected of Indian coastal line and monitoring across the Andaman Sea. (Singh, April 2018)⁶ He Points out in his article that “the ANI is home to India's only tri-services formation: the Andaman and Nicobar Command – a “staging base” for India's Bay of Bengal security initiatives”. At the moment, we have to look at multilateral military engagement and commitment towards world peace. As a result, the engagement of military exercise and dialogue has to be brought out into a multilevel way such as Milan, which was stated in 1995. However, piracy and arms robbery attacks have to increase gradually, even the maritime terrorist and non-state actor domains in these regions. In fact, Andaman and Nicobar command has been holding tremendous action towards illegal activities and smuggling. (Roy-Chaudhury, 1998-1999, p. 139)⁷ He suggested that “ensure the security and stability of SLOCs, especially for the import of energy supplies from West” along with Indian EEZ need to be effectively monitoring and patrolling.

9. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- India needs to improve the naval infrastructure facilities in terms of construction of new ports, increase of naval based towards the North and Middle Andaman.
- India has to engage with Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) for setup the “Multilateral Military Monitoring System” and ensure the security and safety of the Indian Ocean region.
- India needs to open the “Gateway of Economic Corridor” through the connecting with the Andaman Sea to Strait of Malacca. It will reflect our long term economic interest towards the Southeast Asia region.
- India should focus on tourism and fisheries, infrastructure development projects which can help to increase India's foreign policy, soft power capacity in the 21st century. This would improve the bilateral or multilateral engagements through the people to people contacts, B to B linkage, and so on.

10. CONCLUDING REMARKS:

The present scenario of any foreign policy is of more dynamic nature rather than the constant. India's Look East Policy also certainly changes its nature and given more energetic advantage towards the neighbours, with the help that extends the idea of "Act East Policy". The A & N islands can play a significant role in the field of neighbourhood first policy, but the national interest needs the proper infrastructure development such as renovate military equipment, improve tourism infrastructure, approve for landing international flights, and set up cold storage for seafood production etc. to some extents, these islands would create strategic hub for the counter chines naval power in the Indian Ocean region.

REFERENCES

1. Khurana, G. S. (2006). Shaping Security in India's Maritime East: Role of Andaman & Nicobar. *Strategic Analysis*, 161-181.
2. Rajendram, D. (December 2014). India's new Asia-Pacific strategy: Modi Acts East. *Lowy Institute for International Policy*.
3. Kaul, S. (2015). *Andaman and Nicobar Islands India's Untapped Strategic Assets*. NEW DELHI: PENTAGON PRESS.
4. Mukherjee, A. (May 2016). India's Act East Policy: Embedding the Andamans. *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies*, 3.
5. Kumar, D. (2016, February 11). Retrieved February 20, 2019, from www.mea.gov.in:https://mea.gov.in/articles-in-indian-media.htm?dtl/26341/Asean_the_pivot_of_Indias_Act_East_policy
6. Singh, A. (April 2018). *THE NAUTICAL DIMENSION OF INDIA'S "ACT EAST" POLICY*. Nanyang Technological University. Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS).
7. Roy-Chaudhury, R. (1998-1999). India's maritime security. *India International Centre Quarterly*, 129-139.