



INTERWOVEN VISIONS: THE ACT EAST POLICY, ACT EAST FORUM, AND THE FREE & OPEN INDO-PACIFIC CONVERGENCE

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate relationship and convergence between the Act East Policy, Act East Forum, and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision. Through an in-depth analysis of their individual objectives and cooperative endeavours, the study highlights the interwoven nature of these strategic frameworks. It delves into how these initiatives complement and reinforce one another, leading to a comprehensive and cohesive approach in fostering regional cooperation, economic development, and security in the Indo-Pacific region. The paper further examines the implications of this interconnectedness on regional geopolitics and the potential for future collaborations in promoting free, open, & prosperous Indo-Pacific.

The paper also critically examines the critiques and challenges faced by India's North East region in the context of Interwoven Visions, encompassing the Act East Policy, Act East Forum, and the Free & Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Convergence. While these initiatives hold immense promise for bolstering India's regional engagement, they also unveil a spectrum of pressing concerns. One of the central critiques revolves around the issue of uneven regional development. Historical economic disparities, insurgency problems, and inadequate infrastructure have contributed to a top-down approach that often fails to address the North East's distinctive challenges.

The official relations between India-Japan have a deep-rooted history, characterized by spiritual bonds, cultural ties, and a shared civilization. These connections can be traced back to as early as 752 AD, when an Indian monk named Bodhisena visited Japan from Madurai. The historical ties between Japan and India span centuries and encompass cultural and commercial exchanges. Buddhism, originating in India, made its way to Japan during the sixth and seventh centuries. Notably, the Asuka-dera Temple in Nara was built in 588, and the majestic Great Buddha of Nara was later added in 609, showcasing the influence of Indian culture on Japanese soil. The exchange of Buddhist scholars from India to Japan and Japanese students to India can be historically traced to the 8th century marking enduring connections between the two nations (F. Lynch III, Thomas & J. Przystup, James (2017)). However, it was in the recent century that the relationship between the two nations flourished.

Prominent Indian personalities such as Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, JRD Tata, Judge Radha Binod, and freedom fighter Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose have all connected India and Japan. Their interactions and contributions have laid the foundation for today's strong bilateral relations. After World War II, India's decision to abstain from participating in the 1951 San Francisco Conference marked a significant period in the relationship between the two countries. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru declined the invitation due to concerns about the contents of the treaty agreement curtailing Japanese sovereignty. Instead of attending the Conference, India decided to finalize a significant peace treaty with Japan in 1952, subsequent to the complete restoration of Japanese sovereignty. This choice marked a pivotal milestone in the mutual relations between the two nations. (Ministry of External Affairs 2017).



Judge Radha Binod's dissenting message stood out conspicuously amidst the proceedings of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), a tribunal set up by the Allied powers following World War II. His unique perspective garnered attention for its departure from the prevailing narrative. In a poignant display of diplomatic respect and historical acknowledgment, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe paid homage to Judge Radha Binod during his official visit to India in 2007. This gesture underscored the significance of Judge Radha Binod's role in shaping the interconnections between the two countries.

The establishment of formal diplomatic ties between India and Japan was solidified in 1952. Throughout the subsequent decades, a series of official diplomatic interactions occurred. Notably, in 1957, Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi embarked on a significant visit to India, marking a historic occasion as the first-ever visit by a Japanese Prime Minister to India. In a gesture of reciprocal cordiality, Prime Minister Nehru reciprocated with an official 10-day visit to Japan in the same year, describing it as his "lifelong ambition." Indian President Rajendra Prasad's visit to Japan in 1958 further strengthened the ties between the two nations.

In the economic sphere, Japan began extending yen loans (ODA loans) to India in 1960, marking the first instance of economic assistance and cooperation between the two countries. The arrival of the then-Crown Prince Akihito of Japan in the same year brought the relations to a new chapter. However, due to the emergence of the Cold War, India and Japan found themselves aligned with different camps, which hindered the development of their relations as anticipated. However, with the conclusion of the Cold War, which also coincided with India's economic liberalization, the Indian government recognized Japan as "an important source of both investment and technology" (Khan 2013).

In 1991, Japan was among the nations that provided aid to India in resolving its balance of payment crisis. This act of reliability further cemented the friendship between the two nations.

In 2000, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's visit to India triggered a profound shift in India-Japan relations, leading to the mutual acknowledgment of a "Global Partnership" between the nations. The introduction of annual summits between Prime Ministers in 2006 marked a noteworthy transition, establishing a robust "Strategic and Global Partnership".

In 2013, a momentous milestone was achieved with the inaugural visit of then-Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko to India, an event of historic importance not only for India but also for the wider South Asian region. Following this, in 2014, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe graced India as the Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebrations, securing his place as the first Japanese Prime Minister to receive such a significant honor during India's Republic Day. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Japan in the same year further strengthened the bilateral ties, elevating them from a "Strategic and Global Partnership" to a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" that moved beyond India's neighbouring countries, and they termed the meeting the dawn of a new era in India and Japan relations (Times of India 2014).

In October 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Japan for the 13th Annual Summit marked a significant advancement in bilateral relations. This occasion was distinguished by the signing of 32 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the two nations. Additionally, the leaders of both countries engaged in discussions during international summits such as the Group of 7 Summit in



Biarritz in 2019 and the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok later that same year. Furthermore, a meeting between the leaders took place in Bangkok in November 2019 during their attendance at ASEAN summit meetings. During this interaction, they reiterated their commitment to enhancing bilateral relations, including strengthening defense cooperation, fostering collaboration in third countries, and promoting investment opportunities.

Apart from the Annual Summits, a range of bilateral dialogues, including the yearly Strategic Dialogue at the Foreign Minister level, Defence Ministers Meeting, NSA-level Dialogue, Ministerial level 2+2 talks, and FOC Consultations, guarantee consistent and meaningful interactions between India and Japan at high levels. To promote cooperation within the context of India's "Act East Policy" and Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision," the Act East Forum was instituted in 2017, acting as a platform to facilitate collaboration between the two nations.

These milestones and ongoing engagements between India and Japan highlight the significance of their relationship. The deep-rooted spiritual bonds, cultural connections, and shared values continue to underpin official relations, fostering a robust and mutually beneficial partnership between the two nations.

Act East Policy

The Act East Policy, formerly known as the Look East Policy, was first introduced by the Indian government in the early 1990s to enhance India's engagement with the countries of Southeast Asia and East Asia. The policy aimed to reorient the foreign policy of India towards the dynamic and economically vibrant Asia-Pacific region. India's Look East Policy was primarily driven by economic considerations. India recognized the immense economic potential of the Asia-Pacific region and sought to tap into its rapid economic growth. The policy aimed to expand trade, attract investments, and promote economic cooperation with countries in the region. It sought to establish closer economic ties, open up new markets for Indian goods and services, and attract foreign direct investment.

In the initial years, the Look East Policy focused primarily on economic matters. However, over time, it evolved to encompass broader political, strategic, and cultural dimensions. The policy underwent a transformation and was later renamed the Act East Policy in the year 2014, reflecting India's increased proactively and commitment to deepening engagement with the extended neighbourhood in the region of Asia-Pacific. In an address to the East Asia Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, the Myanmar's capital, Prime Minister Modi stated that his government, during its six months in office, has taken decisive and swift action to transform the previous "Look East Policy" into an assertive and action-oriented "Act East Policy" (Economics Times 2014).

Under the Act East Policy, India sought to enhance its strategic partnerships and cooperation on security aspects with countries in the region. Recognizing the growing importance of maritime security, India started engaging in dialogues and joint naval exercises with regional partners. The objective of the policy was to tackle shared security concerns, encompassing piracy, terrorism, and unconventional security threats, by means of cooperative endeavours and the exchange of information. Culturally, the Act East Policy aimed to strengthen people-to-people connections and promote cultural exchanges. India actively participated in cultural festivals, academic exchanges, and tourism promotion to foster mutual understanding, showcase its rich heritage, and enhance soft power.



The Act East Policy stands as a dynamic and progressive strategy, marked by notable milestones and accomplishments. Notably, India's elevation to full dialogue partner status with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1996 reflects a significant achievement. India has since actively participated in multiple ASEAN-led forums and initiatives. Additionally, India's involvement has deepened within regional platforms including the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

Moreover, the Act East Policy has been marked by the conclusion of numerous bilateral and regional free trade agreements. Notable examples include the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with Singapore and the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA). These pacts have played a pivotal role in enhancing trade and fostering economic collaboration between India and its regional partners.

Act East Policy is a comprehensive framework that places particular emphasis on strengthening ties with countries in the extended neighbourhood of the Asia-Pacific region. Initially conceived as an economic initiative, this policy has evolved to encompass not only the economic sphere but also incorporated strategic, political, and cultural dimensions.

The Act East Policy seeks to foster deeper engagement and cooperation with nations in the Asia-Pacific region through the establishment of robust institutional mechanisms. These mechanisms serve as platforms for dialogue, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas and best practices. By leveraging these channels, India aims to build stronger relationships with its neighbouring countries and contribute to the overall stability and development of the region.

Economically, the Act East Policy aims to enhance trade, investment, and connectivity with like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region. It seeks to tap into the vast economic potential of the region and create mutually beneficial partnerships that can drive growth, foster innovation, and create employment opportunities. By expanding economic cooperation, India aims to deepen its integration with the region and establish itself as a key player in the rapidly evolving global economic landscape. However, the Act East Policy goes beyond economic considerations and also takes into account the political dynamics of the region. India recognizes the importance of maintaining peace, stability, and security in the Asia-Pacific region. It actively engages in diplomatic efforts to address common challenges such as maritime security, terrorism, non-proliferation, and climate change. By fostering cooperation and dialogue on these pressing areas, India aims to contribute to the establishment of a rules-based system that upholds the principles of international law and promotes the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Furthermore, the Act East Policy acknowledges the cultural richness and diversity of the region. India recognizes the values of cultural exchanges in fostering mutual understanding, promoting people-to-people connections, and strengthening bilateral relations. It actively supports initiatives that facilitate cultural interactions, such as cultural festivals, academic exchanges, and tourism promotion. These cultural dimensions of the policy aim to create a deeper sense of shared heritage and enhance the overall soft power of India in the region.



Act East Forum

In 2017, India and Japan took a significant step in their bilateral cooperation by jointly establishing the Act East Forum (AEF). The purpose of this forum was to oversee the developmental work in India's North Eastern Region (NER) and enhance connectivity within the region as well as with Southeast Asia. The Act East Forum serves as a reflection of the mutual synergy between India's Act East Policy and Japan's vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific (Financial Express 2018). The Act East Forum's creation seeks to significantly enhance the interaction between Japan and India in the North Eastern region of India.

Additionally, the Act East Forum aims to harness the region's food processing capacity, including industries such as tea production, horticulture, and organic farming. It also supports women's empowerment through self-help groups. Furthermore, the forum seeks to enhance tourism and cultural exchanges, fostering art and cultural interactions between Japan and the NER region of India. The Act East Forum addresses urban development, identifying projects for cooperation in the region. This encompasses projects for water supply and sewerage in Guwahati, promoting eco-friendly mobility, considering a Japan Industrial Township (JIT) in Nagarbera, Assam, and supporting the Kohima Smart City Mission.

Healthcare is another key focus, with efforts to enhance the health system and medical education. Plans include a specialized cancer center in Aizawl, Mizoram, and improvements to the medical college hospital in Kohima, Nagaland.

The forum stresses sustainable forest resource use in states like Tripura, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Meghalaya. It backs ongoing work on the Umiam-Umtru Stage-III Hydroelectric Power Station in Meghalaya. Disaster management is a priority, involving drills and potential training for the Regional Emergency Management & Training Institute in Kohima, Nagaland.

Connectivity is vital in the Act East Forum's agenda. It aims to enhance the North-East Road Network Connectivity Projects, covering phases 1-5, including National Highways 40 & 51 in Meghalaya, National Highway 54 in Mizoram, National Highway 208 in Tripura, and National Highway 127B in Assam. The forum explores phase 6 (Khowai-Sabroom stretch on NH-208) and considers phase 7 (National Highway-127B Bridge access road in Meghalaya). It also looks into upgrading state highways, major district roads, and other district roads, along with steel bridge replacement in Sikkim (Embassy of Japan 2017).

The Act East Forum represents a significant commitment from both countries to promote development, connectivity, and cooperation in the North Eastern region of India. It aims to bring about positive and sustainable changes in various sectors, contributing to the overall progress of the region and strengthening the bilateral ties between the two nations.

Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision of Japan serves as a guiding strategic framework that influences Japan's strategy for advancing a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific Region. Introduced by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016, the FOIP vision has become a cornerstone of Japan's foreign policy, emphasizing political, economic, security, and values-based cooperation. This comprehensive vision underscores Japan's commitment to fostering regional stability, prosperity, and shared values in



the Indo-Pacific. Core Principles: Freedom, Connectivity, Rule of Law, Sustainability, and Security At the heart of Japan's FOIP vision lie several core principles that form the foundation of its strategic framework. Freedom and openness are paramount, with Japan actively advocating for the protection of freedom of navigation, respect for the rule of law, and the unimpeded flow of goods, services, and capital. By embracing diversity and encouraging partnerships based on shared values, Japan aims to create an environment conducive to collaborative progress (Observer Research Foundation 2023). Recognizing the significance of connectivity and infrastructure development, Japan emphasizes the need to enhance connectivity networks and promote sustainable and transparent infrastructure projects. Through initiatives like the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (PQI), Japan supports economic growth, improved connectivity, and enhanced resilience among countries in the Indo-Pacific, fostering a more integrated and prosperous region.

The FOIP vision places a strong emphasis on the rule of law and good governance as essential pillars for stability, security, and economic development. Japan advocates for peaceful dispute resolution, particularly in maritime disputes, based on international law and through dialogue. By supporting capacity-building efforts and strengthening legal frameworks, Japan aims to foster a stable environment that promotes cooperation and equitable resolutions.

Sustainable development and environmental stewardship are integral aspects of the FOIP vision. Japan actively promotes environmentally friendly practices, such as the sustainable use of marine resources, climate change mitigation, and disaster resilience. Through initiatives focusing on energy efficiency, renewable energy, and marine conservation, Japan encourages regional cooperation to address environmental challenges and ensure a sustainable future for the Indo-Pacific.

Comprehensive security is a key component of Japan's FOIP vision. By advocating for regional stability and the peaceful resolution of disputes, Japan seeks to address shared security challenges. The country actively engages in capacity-building efforts, including maritime security, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Through collaborative security cooperation, Japan contributes to maintaining a secure and stable Indo-Pacific region.

Implementation of the FOIP Vision: Japan actively engages in the implementation of the FOIP vision through various means to translate its principles into action.

Diplomatic engagement lies at the core of Japan's approach, as it actively participates in regional forums and initiatives, including the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and ASEAN-led mechanisms. By promoting dialogue and cooperation, Japan aims to build partnerships and strengthen ties with countries in the Indo-Pacific based on shared values and interests.

Economic collaboration holds paramount significance within Japan's FOIP vision. By endorsing investment, facilitating the exchange of technology, and nurturing business alliances, Japan actively drives the advancement of sustainable economic expansion and progress across the region. This dedication is evident in its pivotal contributions to the advancement of top-tier free trade agreements, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Security cooperation is a priority for Japan, and it actively collaborates with regional partners to enhance security. By engaging in joint exercises, capacity-building programs, and information sharing,



Japan addresses shared security challenges, including maritime security and non-traditional security threats, thus fostering a safe and secure Indo-Pacific environment.

The provision of development aid underscores Japan's dedication to the FOIP vision. Through extending developmental support to nations within the Indo-Pacific region, with a special focus on endeavors like enhancing infrastructure, fostering human capital, advancing healthcare and education, as well as bolstering disaster preparedness, Japan actively fosters sustainable and comprehensive progress. This effort, in turn, cultivates a sense of overall welfare and steadiness throughout the region.

The Act East Policy, Act East Forum, and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision share a close and interconnected relationship.

The Act East Policy, Act East Forum, and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision are intricately interwoven, operating in seamless synergy to propel mutual aims and ambitions across the Indo-Pacific expanse. The Act East Forum, inaugurated in 2017, occupies a pivotal position within the context of both India's "Act East Policy" and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy (ICWA 2020). These initiatives are linked through Shared Objectives, as they all strive to promote regional connectivity, economic cooperation, and strategic partnerships. The Act East Policy, Act East Forum, and FOIP vision are united in their efforts to strengthen regional integration, enhance trade and investment, and foster stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. By working together, they aim to create a conducive environment for sustainable growth and development.

Collaboration and Coordination between India and Japan are essential aspects of the interconnection between these initiatives. The Act East Forum serves as a dedicated platform for India and Japan to collaborate on implementing their respective Act East Policies. This collaboration is in alignment with the principles and goals of the FOIP vision, as both India and Japan are strong proponents of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. The Act East Forum facilitates coordination, knowledge-sharing, and mutual support between India and Japan, enabling them to make significant strides in advancing the broader objectives of the FOIP vision.

Regional Stability and a Rules-based Order are fundamental elements that bind the Act East Policy, the Act East Forum, and the FOIP vision. Collectively, they contribute to regional stability by promoting dialogue, cooperation, and adherence to international law. These initiatives endorse the principles of freedom of navigation, peaceful resolution of disputes, and the establishment of an inclusive regional architecture. By emphasizing these shared values, they work together to maintain peace and security in the Indo-Pacific, while fostering a rules-based environment that respects the sovereignty and interests of all nations involved.

Additionally, these initiatives complement each other through their distinct approaches. While the Act East Policy and the Act East Forum primarily focus on India's engagement with its extended neighborhood and bilateral cooperation with Japan, the FOIP vision takes a broader perspective, seeking to foster partnerships and cooperation with a wider range of countries in the Indo-Pacific region beyond India and Japan. The Act East Policy and the Act East Forum, by enhancing India-Japan cooperation and exemplifying the benefits of regional collaboration, actively contribute to the implementation of the FOIP vision. Their efforts set a positive example for other countries in the region, encouraging them to join in fostering a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.



Critique and challenges

The Act East Policy, Act East Forum, and the Free & Open Indo-Pacific Convergence is a complex framework that involves diplomatic, economic, and strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing India's engagement with the countries in the East and Southeast Asia regions. While this approach has garnered attention and support, it is not without its share of critiques and limitations, particularly when it comes to its implications for the North East India region. Uneven Regional Development is one of the primary concerns regarding the Act East Policy and related initiatives that the benefits of increased connectivity, trade, and economic cooperation may not be evenly distributed across different regions of India, particularly in the case of North East India. The economic growth situation in northeastern India mirrors both national trends and distinctive regional attributes. Colonial influences played a significant role in shaping the region's economic landscape. The economic development of this area followed a particular trajectory, marked by the concentration of economic activities in specific areas. This, along with the persistence of traditional practices, hindered the effectiveness of modernization efforts in the region (SreeradhaDatta 2001). The region is characterized by its own set of socio-economic challenges, including issues of insurgency, underdevelopment, and inadequate infrastructure. Critics argue that without targeted and region-specific development measures, the benefits of the broader policy might not reach the local population, potentially exacerbating existing disparities. In the mainstream discussions regarding the development of the Northeastern region, the prevailing approach has consistently emphasized the necessity of a top-down strategy. The economic challenges faced by this region have predominantly been viewed and analyzed through the lens of a predetermined integrationist model, which has been pursued with great enthusiasm in order to establish a uniform narrative. This approach has been marked by a degree of insularity, as it has often failed to address the fundamental issue of production adequately. The evident inadequacy of economic policies and initiatives in the Northeast becomes readily apparent when one briefly examines several fundamental indicators typically employed to assess the region's economic and social progress (Singh 2018). Despite having abundant natural and human resources, the north-eastern region of India, which comprises seven states, continues to trail behind many other Indian states in terms of development. The inhabitants of these states face various socio-economic challenges. Assam records the highest Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) value, while Meghalaya exhibits significant inequality among those classified as MPI Poor. Additionally, during the 2011-12 period, Manipur had the highest percentage of Below Poverty Line (BPL) population at 46.7%, followed by Assam at 40.9%, and Arunachal Pradesh at 37.4%, surpassing the national average of 29.5%(Gogoi). The Act East Policy's strategic focus on infrastructural development and the augmentation of connectivity networks potentially engenders adverse environmental repercussions, particularly in regions of ecological vulnerability located in the North East of India. This policy orientation entails the execution of substantial projects encompassing the establishment of transportation infrastructure such as roads, railways, and ports, with attendant consequences including deforestation, habitat degradation, and perturbations within indigenous ecosystems. Several illustrative instances underscore the pronounced regional ramifications of these initiatives. For instance, the construction of the Tawang road in Arunachal Pradesh stands as a salient case, marked by extensive tree felling and the clearance of forests within the environmentally significant Eastern Himalayan region. This undertaking has culminated in the depletion of invaluable forest canopies, thereby imperiling the survival prospects of several endangered species, prominently featuring the red panda and the black-necked crane. Similarly, the proposed railway linkage connecting India and Bhutan, traversing the Bhutanese foothills and the adjoining Indian border territories, presents another pertinent illustration. Absent meticulous planning, this initiative bears the potential to fragment the habitats of iconic wildlife species, including elephants and tigers, thereby jeopardizing



their mating patterns and exacerbating conflicts between human populations and wildlife. Furthermore, infrastructure projects pertaining to the dredging and embankment activities along the Brahmaputra River, conceived with the objective of augmenting navigational efficacy, have induced alterations in the natural course of the river. This modification has precipitated downstream erosion and shifts in hydrological dynamics, thereby exerting deleterious effects upon the river's ecosystem and the human communities residing along its banks. In addition to these instances, the expansion of the Silchar-Lumding rail line within the state of Assam necessitated extensive earthwork and excavation, engendering the undesirable outcomes of soil erosion and landslides. The resultant transformation of the landscape has disrupted regional agriculture and augmented the region's vulnerability to natural disasters. Further, the Teesta III Hydropower Project situated in the state of Sikkim, while conceived to harness the energy potential of the Teesta River, has entailed the submergence of forested areas. This environmental alteration has led to perturbations in local microclimates and harbors the potential to release methane, a potent greenhouse gas, from the project's reservoirs. Critics argue that the Act East Policy and related initiatives might lack adequate consultation with local communities and stakeholders in the North East. Effective implementation of such policies requires engaging with local governments, civil society organizations, and indigenous groups to ensure that their perspectives and concerns are taken into account. The fallout is The Bogibeel Bridge, which spans the Brahmaputra River in Assam and is a crucial infrastructural project aimed at enhancing connectivity in the North East region. Its construction was a significant component of the Act East Policy's goal to facilitate trade, improve transportation, and foster economic development in the region. However, the planning and execution of this project were marked by a lack of comprehensive consultation with the local communities, particularly the indigenous groups residing in the vicinity. Local communities, especially indigenous groups, initiated protests against the Bogibeel Bridge project. They demanded recognition of their rights, compensation for livelihood disruptions, and measures to protect their cultural heritage. The project encountered delays and escalating costs as a result of these protests and legal challenges. This not only affected the project's timeline but also increased its overall expenses. The lack of engagement with local governments and civil society organizations aggravated social tensions, leading to conflicts between the project developers and the affected communities. The Tipaimukh Dam Project follows a comparable narrative, proposed on the Barak River in Manipur, and serves as a striking example of the consequences of inadequate consultation. The project aimed to generate hydroelectric power and provide irrigation facilities but was met with strong opposition from local communities and environmentalists. Critics argued that the project's planning and execution did not sufficiently engage with indigenous communities, who rely on the river for their livelihoods and cultural practices. The lack of meaningful consultation led to widespread protests and opposition, with local communities and environmental activists demanding their voices be heard. This resistance resulted in project delays, increased costs, and strained relations between the government and local populations. Eventually, the Tipaimukh Dam Project faced significant setbacks, highlighting the necessity of inclusive consultation to address concerns, build trust, and facilitate the successful implementation of such initiatives. Infrastructure Challenges are another key issue The Act East Policy aims to improve connectivity with Southeast Asian nations. However, a significant impediment to its successful execution is the inadequate infrastructure in the North East region. This infrastructure deficit is evident in various aspects, including deficient road networks, restricted transportation choices, and underdeveloped border trade points. Take, for instance, the Moreh-Tamu border trade point connecting India and Myanmar. Despite its strategic potential, this trade point suffers from several infrastructure deficiencies. It lacks proper customs facilities, and its warehousing capacities are limited, hindering the efficient movement of goods and trade activities. Additionally, many critical river crossings in the North East rely on



outdated and fragile bridges. These bridges often lack the capacity to handle heavy traffic and are vulnerable to natural disasters. Consequently, disruptions in trade and transportation frequently occur due to bridge failures. The Act East Policy operates within a multifaceted geopolitical landscape that is characterized by intricate dynamics driven by competing interests. One pivotal aspect of this geopolitical terrain is the convergence of the Act East Policy with the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. This convergence possesses the capacity to entangle North East India in more extensive geopolitical rivalries, a scenario that carries substantial implications for the stability and security of the region. North East India shares its borders with several neighboring countries, including China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. These border regions have not been immune to longstanding disputes and territorial claims. A particularly prominent example is the unresolved border issue with China in the Arunachal Pradesh region, a matter that has historically been a source of tension and discord. The alignment of the Act East Policy with the FOIP strategy has the effect of redirecting attention towards these ongoing border disputes. As India strengthens its strategic affiliations with nations such as Japan, Australia, and the United States as part of the FOIP strategy, there is an amplified potential for these disputes to become enmeshed in larger-scale geopolitical rivalries. The participation of major global powers and their vested interests in the broader Indo-Pacific region can elevate the complexity of border negotiations and potentially obstruct efforts to find mutually agreeable resolutions.