India's Act East Policy

Why in news?

The recent visit of Prime Minister of India to Singapore and Brunei are part of India's broader diplomatic initiative, the Act East Policy, which aims to foster stronger relationships in the Asia-Pacific region.

What is India's Act East Policy?

- It is a policy that focuses on the extended neighbourhood in the Indo-Pacific region, with ASEAN as its core.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) comprises of 10 Southeast Asian states which promotes intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic integration amongst its members.

- **Formation –** It was *launched in 2014* at the 12th ASEAN-India Summit in Myanmar.
- It is an *extension of Look East Policy of 1992*, a strategic foreign policy aimed at engaging with Southeast Asia.
- **Objectives** – It seeks to promote *economic cooperation, cultural ties* and develop strategic relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific region
- It also aims to provide improved regional connectivity, trade, and strategic cooperation.
- **Working** – It promotes continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.
- It works through various tools like Lines of Credit (LOC), grant assistance, and capacity-building programmes like the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC).
- **Dialogue partners** – Its central focus is on ASEAN countries, which include Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, and Myanmar.
- India has also forged partnerships with Japan, South Korea, and Australia under this policy.

In 2018, ASEAN leaders were in India for a summit and the Republic Day parade.

To know about India's Neighbourhood Policy, click here

What are the key features this policy?

- **Indo-Pacific focus**- It centres on the Indo-Pacific region, with ASEAN at its core,

aiming to build a robust strategic presence.

- **Connectivity**- To strengthen connectivity between India's Northeastern states and neighbouring countries, fostering closer socio-economic ties.
- **Institutional dialogue**- It creates a platform for consistent institutional dialogue and cooperation with partner countries in the region.
- **Three pillars**- It focuses on three main areas of cooperation
    - Political and security matters
    - Socio-cultural exchange
    - Economic partnerships

India's presence in the Malacca Strait, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, has also allowed it to influence maritime activities in the Indo-Pacific region. The Strait of Malacca is the shortest shipping route between the Far East and the Indian Ocean.

What are important initiatives under this policy?

- It has led to numerous development projects aimed at strengthening infrastructure and fostering closer ties with regional neighbours.

Name	Objective
India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project	• It connects India's Northeast with Myanmar and Thailand. • It enhances trade and travel between the regions.
Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project	• It focuses on boosting connectivity between India and Myanmar. • It aids in the development of India's landlocked Northeastern states
Rhi-Tiddim Road Project	• It further strengthens connectivity between India and Myanmar.
Border Haats	• It is a border trade centre. • It is to foster closer economic relations between India and its neighbours mainly Bangladesh and Myanmar.
Agartala-Akhaura Rail Link	• It connects India and Bangladesh.
Mahabahu-Brahmaputra Inland Waterway Programme	• It is designed to improve intermodal transport links and inland waterways in the region.

What are the significance of this policy?

- **Counters China** - By increasing its engagement with Southeast Asian nations through defence, diplomacy, and economic ties, India positions itself as an alternative to China, offering a more balanced and collaborative approach.
    - India will provide an adequate number of BrahMos Missiles to the Philippines to beef up its security in the context of the increasing threat from China in the South China Sea.

- **Promotes peace in Indo-pacific** - India aims to maintain freedom of navigation and uphold the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Enhances regional security** – It aligns with India's involvement in the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), further boosting regional security and cooperation.

What lies ahead?

- Address regional challenges to maintain a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.
- Strengthen trade relations by negotiating and implementing comprehensive free trade agreements (FTAs).
- Enhance market access for Indian businesses in East Asia.
- Foster partnerships with like-minded nations to address global challenges such as climate change, digital economy, and sustainable development in need of the hour.

Reference

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