

Fellow's Presentation- MAKAIAS

-----Topic:

RELEVANCE OF THE NORTH-EAST REGION IN INDO-ASEAN EVOLVING DYNAMICS

Presenter: **Ms. Sayantani Sen Mazumdar**, Fellow, MAKAIAS

External Expert: **Dr. Lipi Ghosh**, Reader, South & South East Asian Studies, University of Cal.

Date: **19.10.2012**

Time: **12 pm**

Venue: **Azad Bhavan, Salt Lake**

Rapporteur: **Arpita Basu**, Researcher, MAKAIAS

Sayantani Sen Mazumdar's presentation was an analytical survey to situate the relevance of the North-East Region as India's gateway to ASEAN, which in turn, is conceived as a springboard by India to reach out to the wider Pacific Region. Ms. Mazumdar observed that the origin of India's Look-East Policy could be traced back to the changed geo-political context of the international system in the early 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War triggered a plethora of development in the international arena. This development provided a boost to the growth of regional economic organizations. Sayantani argued that the shift of primacy from the West to the East, the increasing success of the East Asian Tiger economies and the growing convergence of India's economic and strategic interests inspired New Delhi to be inclined more towards the thriving economies of East and South East Asia. She found that the process of globalisation established a competitive zeal among the world economies and induced a wave of regionalism. The paper posited that complying with the principles of globalization and liberalization, India was opening up to the world economy and the Look-East Policy of the early nineties was the outcome. Sayantani highlighted economic reforms unleashed by the forces of globalization, the renewed concern about China's increasing assertiveness in South East Asia as well as India's vulnerability to Beijing's expanding dominance in the Asia-Pacific Region which instigated India to reformulate the theoretical postulates of its foreign policy. She showed that the second phase, which began in 2003, was more comprehensive as it brought the greater Asia Pacific Region - Japan, South Korea - within its ambit with ASEAN as its core. In the second phase, the Look-East Policy acquired a distinct dimension wherein the essence of Indo-ASEAN cooperation was inextricably linked to the economic and security interests of its North Eastern Region. Finally she concluded that the NER, being peripheral to South East Asia, is a veritable gateway to the realisation of India's LEP and thereby possesses prospects for substantive economic development of the region itself and of the entire country as well. Consequently, the success of the Look-East Policy depends largely on India's friendly and cooperative ties with its resource-rich neighbour. At this juncture she suggested that India should devote its potential to utilizing the available resources in the North

East Region. Cooperative endeavours based on mutual trust and confidence would strengthen the very essence of Indo-ASEAN cooperation.

Discussion Session

The external expert Dr. Lipi Ghosh congratulated the presenter for her painstaking attempt at covering the relevant aspects and then made certain valuable comments, observations and insights for the betterment of the paper. She felt that the presenter had tried to grasp too many aspects simultaneously. Foremost Dr. Ghosh suggested that context of local policies, political mindsets, and the localization of politics need to be analysed and the influence of globalization process should be emphasized. She advised the presenter to consider the argument of Look-East Policy and focus on its historical background, cultural affiliation and traditional links. She also suggested that the presenter incorporate the importance of Thailand, East Asia Summit and Institutional development of Indo-ASEAN developmental projects. Dr. Ghosh commented that the presenter laid too much emphasis on Myanmar, but detailed analysis of Myanmar's policy with ASEAN countries should be included. She also encouraged Ms. Sen Mazumdar to take into consideration issues like Non-traditional Security, Coco Island issue, Insurgency problem and the role of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram in this respect. Dr. Ghosh suggested giving inputs on tourism, trade and education and a detailed discussion on the Stilwell Road. She ended by encouraging Ms. Mazumdar to bring out some original recommendations to help in making a foreign policy for India and to incorporate more data, maps etc.

Dr. Sreeradha Dutta, Director MAKAIAS, Kolkata suggested that the relevant vistas of cooperation with South East Asia needed to be focused on, since Myanmar is a small portion of the LEP. NER should focus trade through Myanmar and the pertinence of Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore need to be mentioned. Dr. Dutta made a sharp observation about considering ground realities. She commented that many of the infrastructural issues need to be substantiated. Finally, she felt that assessment of ground realities, statistics and progress are the need of the hour.

Comments and observations from the floor highlighted the following issues:

- Discussion was carried out on the differential advantage that NER could offer to Myanmar that China couldn't.
- It was argued whether development initiatives could be counter-effective or not.
- Issues of India's cooperation with Myanmar in tackling insurgencies were discussed.
- A question regarding how identities are articulated in the Indo-Myanmar border region was raised.
- Discussion was carried on about the various networks responsible for economic growth.
- A question was raised on whether any of the developmental initiatives under LEP for the NER are detrimental to the development of the NER.