

SPEECH OF HON'BLE GOVERNOR SHRI V. SHANMUGANATHAN ON THE 1ST ACADEMIC SESSION, "ACT EAST AND INDIA'S NORTH-EAST: HOW TO REAP THE DIVIDEND", ORGANISED BY THE ASEAN STUDY CENTRE, INDIAN COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH (ICSSR) - NORTH EAST REGIONAL CENTRE (NERC), NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY (NEHU), SHILLONG ON 09 AUG 2016

Respected Dignitaries on the dais, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be present at this august gathering of the 1st Academic Session, "Act East and India's North-East: How to Reap the Dividend", organised by the ASEAN Study Centre, Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) - North East Regional Centre (NERC), North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Campus, Shillong. It gives me great pleasure to know that the Centre has been inaugurated just 8 (eight) months after the announcement of the proposal to open an ASEAN Study Centre at NEHU by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi ji in his opening statement at the India-ASEAN Summit in November 2015 at Kaula Lampur. This also symbolizes the importance and high priority that the Hon'ble Prime Minister attaches both, to the country's relations with the ASEAN countries as well as the pivotal role that is envisaged for the North East India in fostering these relations further.

It is heartening to note that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India has entrusted this challenging task to ICSSR-NERC, NEHU Campus. I have high expectations that the ICSSR North Eastern Regional Centre, an autonomous research institute and a noted think-tank in the country will meaningfully participate, contribute and engage in research and dialogue in connecting the North-eastern states of India with the ASEAN Community. With the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi ji making our South-East Asian neighbours, a foreign policy priority, the now re-named 'Act East' Policy redraws the importance of India's North-eastern states as the gateway to South-East Asian countries.

India launched the Look East policy (LEP) in the 1990s to develop close ties with the ASEAN countries. It is well known that India has had close historical links with the South East Asian Countries, particularly in the fields of commerce and culture. Ancient

history has enough evidence that had dynamic cultural and commercial engagements with . Till the 12th century AD, these relations prospered on the basis of philosophical and cultural contacts. Hinduism, and later Buddhism, were the vehicles for the synthesis of a common cultural entity in the region. The popularity of Ramayana with varying nuances from one country to the other, engravings of the Mahabharata and Ramayana in the temples of Angkor Wat in , and LuangPrabang in , besides the eminence of NalandaUniversity, are testimony to our cultural and religious ties. These cultural relations in turn also promoted trade.

The story of the king Manuneechi Chola from Tiruvarur is also quite famous in Bangkok. The story goes like this: Under the rule of this king, the justice system was very strict. The king was known for the fair justice he meted out to everyone. His people could meet him directly and share about their problems. They had to ring a bell which was put outside the King's palace. Once while driving a car his son hit a calf and it got killed. The mother cow went to the palace and rang the bell. The king wanted to know its reason and asked his people to find out what happened with the cow. He came to know that the prince has killed the baby calf. He took the prince to the same spot where the accident occurred and meted out punishment to him, thus giving justice to the cow.

In Bangkok, there is a road which is known by the name of Lord Ram i.e. Rama Road. These are certain examples which are common between us.

Today, ASEAN and India together represent a combined population of over 2 (two) billion and a of over US \$3.8 trillion, creating one of the largest economies of the world. India-ASEAN relations have progressed steadily since 1990s and India is now a strategic partner of the ASEAN. India and ASEAN share convergence of interest on several fronts. Both are strong economies and attractive markets. The expansion of India's relations with the region can be very well gauged from the fact that trade between India and ASEAN multiplied from US \$ 3 billion in 1990 to almost US \$ 80 billion now, and is expected to grow exponentially in the coming years. Beyond Trade, economic cooperation between India and ASEAN now extends to sectors like tourism, transport and infrastructure, agriculture, forestry, human resource development, science and technology, health and pharmaceuticals, small and medium enterprises, information and communication technology and green energy. India ASEAN relations also extend

to political, security and cultural cooperation.

Experience shows that re-development of close linkages in the field of culture and higher and technical education eventually leads to growth in several other areas also. In this context, given 's growing relations with South East Asia, I believe the North Eastern region will have a huge role to play in India's "Act East" policy given its geographic proximity to the South East Asian region. Northeast India can serve as the cultural bridge between and .

India's Act East Policy has three basic components:

- 1) It has its emphasis on trade, investment and tourism to harness the human and capital potential between the two sides;
- 2) It aims for the promotion and development of North-eastern states of India and aims at better and dependable transport connectivity;
- 3) It also aims to build bilateral and multilateral relations with Southeast Asian countries.

In a nutshell, we can say that the Act East Policy has both geo-economic and geo-political objective with a desire to incorporate the development of the North-eastern states of India.

North-East India shares borders with China, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh culminating in a long international border. The historical trade links between the North-eastern part of India and the Southeast Asian countries were severed during the colonial rule, and the revival of connectivity and trade will enhance India-ASEAN trade. Border trade between India (through the north-eastern states) and ASEAN is said to have a huge potential. Potential for trade and investment includes skill development, agricultural products, manufacturing, and energy among others. North East India stands to gain through project initiatives such as India- Myanmar Friendship Road or the Moreh-Tamu-Kalewa Road; India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway; Kaladan Multimodal project and the Optical fiber network between North-East India and . I am happy to say that North East India is poised to benefit from 's growing relations with as the process of globalisation has shown how cross border trade ushers in prosperity for the people.

I would like to suggest certain ideas which would be beneficial for this Policy. First and foremost, the issue of land connection of North East India towards should be taken into concern. It needs to be improved soon as this has a major role to play. Secondly, we can improve the trade relation by identifying goods that are required in . The quality of our products should be improved. Thirdly, we have best English teachers, nurses, dance, music and sport personalities. We can contribute the expertise in this field to other ASEAN countries. Fourthly, we can improve tourism here. There is a lot of scope as North East India is still unexplored and there is a lot of curiosity to see its scenic beauty and biodiversity.

India's Act East "through the Northeast" will also assure this region of its due right of all round development ensuring economic prosperity. I believe the people of the North-eastern states will benefit immensely from these initiatives and this newly established ASEAN Study Centre here at NEHU is meant to facilitate the enhancing of people-to-people contact, dialogue engagements, connectivity and so on which, I am sure you will deliberate at length during the course of this brain storming session. I extend my best wishes to the Study Centre with the hope that it will fulfil its mandate in the very near future. With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this academic session on 'Act East and India's North-East'.

Jai Hind!
