



RISING ASIA
JOURNAL



RISING ASIA
FOUNDATION

RESEARCH ARTICLE

JANGKHONGAM DOUNGEL

*Mizoram University, Senior Fulbright Research Fellow,
University of Cincinnati*

The Role of Mizoram as a Significant Actor in India's Act East Policy

Keywords: Act East, Mizoram, Southeast Asia, Kolodyne, Myanmar, China

ABSTRACT

India's Look East Policy, renamed Act East Policy in 2014, aims at bridging the gap with Southeast Asian countries and improving both diplomatic and commercial ties with them. The targeted goal, however, may not be achieved without the involvement and participation of the Northeastern states on account of their geographical contiguity with Southeast Asian countries. Two Act East policy projects, namely, the Kolodyne Hydro-Electric Project II (HEP II) and the Kolodyne Multi Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP) Road, have been undertaken in the state of Mizoram. Besides these, a Land Customs Station has opened at Zokhawthar. This

RISING ASIA JOURNAL.

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1 (WINTER/SPRING) JANUARY TO APRIL 2022.

© RISING ASIA FOUNDATION 2022.

article analyzes the significance of Mizoram in the ongoing Act East Policy and assesses whether, or not, the change of the nomenclature from “look” to “act” really activates the project at the ground level.

The Look East Policy (LEP) can be described as an offshoot of globalization and privatization, marking a strategic shift in India's foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. It was developed and enacted during the government of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and vigorously pursued by the successive governments of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Dr. Manmohan Singh. The essential philosophy of the LEP is that India must find its destiny by linking itself more and more with its Asian partners and the rest of the world, and that India's future and economic interests are best served by greater integration with East and Southeast Asian countries. As India's dependable and reliable partner in all fronts, the erstwhile Soviet Union, had already exited from the international political scenario in the early 1990s, India had to look toward her neighboring Southeast Asian countries for economic survival as well as to counter the growing influence of China in the region. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said that the LEP was not merely an external economic policy but also a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and India's place in the evolving global economy.¹ India's main agenda in framing and pursuing the LEP was to establish durable diplomatic linkages and cordial trade relationship with the Southeast Asian countries within the rubric of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), established in August 1967 in Bangkok by representatives of Indonesia, Malaysia, the

¹ Lakhan Mehrotra, “India's Look East Policy: Its Origin and Development,” *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 7, No. 1 (2012): 75–85.



Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.² Brunei joined Asean in 1984, shortly after its independence from the United Kingdom, and Vietnam joined as its seventh member in 1995. Laos and Burma were admitted into full membership in July 1997 as Asean celebrated its thirtieth anniversary, and Cambodia became the tenth member in 1999.

The LEP was classified into two phases, the first phase running from 1991 to 2002 when it concentrated on trade and investment linkages with Asean countries. The second phase, however, which began in 2003 was more comprehensive in its coverage, extending from Australia to East Asia, with Asean as its core agenda. A new sub-regional grouping, BIST-EC, comprising Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand was established in Bangkok in June 1997 as part of the endeavor to strengthen India's and South Asia's linkages with the East and Southeast Asian region as well as to reinforce the LEP. Following inclusion of Myanmar in December 1997 during a special Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok, the group was renamed BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand Economic Cooperation). With the admission of Nepal and Bhutan at the 6th Ministerial Meeting in February 2004 in Thailand, the grouping's name was changed to Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation or BIMSTEC. India, in fact, promotes BIMSTEC to establish economic links with peninsular member countries of Asean in order to boost the economic development of its seven Northeastern states.

After the formation of the National Democratic Alliance II (NDA II) government by Narendra Modi, the name of the policy was changed from the Look East Policy to Act East Policy in 2014. This article examines whether the change of nomenclature has really activated the

² Christophe Jaffrelot, "India's Look East Policy: An Asianist Strategy in Perspective, *India Review* 2, No. 2 (2003): 35-68.

projects at the ground level. The article also assesses the significance of the state of Mizoram in the Act East Policy by examining the two ongoing projects and a Land Custom Station (LCS) which have been undertaken in the state, as well as the strategic location of the state of Mizoram at the international border. The methodology for the present research paper is based on historical and analytical approaches, employing both primary and secondary sources.

A Brief Political History of Mizoram

Mizoram, earlier known as Lushai Hills, was the domain of tribal chiefs in the precolonial era. The Sailo chiefs—and other chiefs of the Lusei and Zo ethnic tribes—ruled in the north and Lunglei region of the South Lushai Hills, while the Pawi (Lai) chiefs and Lakher (Mara) chiefs ruled in the extreme south of the Lushai Hills. Lushai Hills was independent in its own way in the precolonial era and it was never subjugated under the diktat of any outside rulers, except for payment of taxes and tributes to powerful Lai Chieftdoms of the Chin Hills. It was never annexed by the Ahom rulers, Cachari rulers, or any Hindu or Muslim rulers of the Indian plains. Lushai Hills was, therefore, never annexed by any outside forces or rulers before the coming of British colonialism.

The reason for British colonial intervention in Lushai Hills was the attack on Alexandrapore tea garden by Sailo Chiefs, Bengkhuaia Sailo and Savunga Sailo, who were brothers, on January 23, 1871. Bengkhuaia Sailo was Chief of Sailam and Savunga Sailo was Chief of Buarpui.³ The Lusei raiders under Sailo Chiefs killed James Winchester, the planter and captured his daughter, Mary Winchester. The alarming

³ S. Thangboi Zou, "Riverine Bazaars, Trade and Chiefs in the Colonial Lushai Hills," *Asian Ethnicity* 22, No. 4 (2021): 563–582; and Lalhruaitluanga Ralte, *Thangliana* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2013), 157–158.



news of the raid, killing, and kidnapping of British citizens circulated far and wide, even in the Western media. It was portrayed as a challenge for the colonial power which was identified with the maxim, “The sun never sets on the British Empire.” Many other tea gardens in Cachar, Chittagong, and Tripura were also simultaneously attacked, inflicting heavy casualties on British subjects. As a result of the raids in Alexandrapole tea garden and other places, British forces launched the Lushai Expedition of 1871–1872, attacking Lushai Hills from Cachar and Chittagong. The Lushai Expedition came to an end with the rescue of Mary Winchester from the captivity of Bengkhuai Sairo. British forces returned after her rescue.⁴

As the chiefs of Chin Hills and Lushai Hills continued raiding and disturbing British subjects in the plains, British forces launched the Chin Lushai Expedition in 1889–1890. Lushai Hills was attacked from Chittagong and Cachar, and Chin Hills was attacked from Southern Chin Hills and Northern Chin Hills. The result of the 1889–90 expedition was total subjugation of Chin Hills and Lushai Hills under British administration which punished many chiefs. British administration was introduced in Lushai Hills from 1891 and it was brought under the British Empire with effect from September 6, 1895.⁵

Lushai Hills was divided into two administrative units, South Lushai Hills with headquarters at Lunglei under the jurisdiction of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, and North Lushai Hills with

⁴ Thomas H. Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 258, 275–277.

⁵ Bertram S. Carey and H.N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills: A History of the People, Our Dealings with Them, Their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country, Volume I*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1976), 13 and 33–40.

headquarters at Aizawl under the administrative jurisdiction of the Chief Commissioner of Assam since 1891, and they were amalgamated into the Lushai Hills District under the administrative jurisdiction of the Chief Commissioner of Assam with effect from April 1, 1898.⁶ Lushai Hills remained a district of Assam till it was upgraded as the Union Territory of Mizoram with effect from January 21, 1972. Further, Lushai Hills, later Mizoram, was an insurgency infested territory for two decades due to unilateral declaration of independence of Mizoram by the Mizo National Front (MNF) on March 1, 1966. A peace accord was, however, signed on June 30, 1986 by the MNF and the Government of India, and Mizoram was upgraded to the status of statehood with effect from February 20, 1987.⁷ As Mizoram shares an international border with both Myanmar (Burma) and Bangladesh, Mizoram has its own significance in India's Act East Policy. Over and above the weightage of Mizoram in the AEP, two important AEP projects have been undertaken in Mizoram.

Role of Myanmar and China in India's Act East Policy

Myanmar and Northeast India

The strategic location of Myanmar makes it an important actor in the successful implementation of AEP projects. It should be noted that the northeastern states of India share international borders with Nepal, China, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar—but Myanmar has less than one percent land contiguity with the rest of India through a

⁶ Jangkhongam Doungel, *Lai Chieftainship and Its Impact in Politics* (Delhi: Balaji Publications, 2015), 113–117.

⁷ Jangkhongam Doungel, *Evolution of District Council Autonomy in Mizoram* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2010), 1.



twenty-two kilometer Siliguri corridor which is often called the 'chicken's neck.' The northeastern states, comprising 8 percent of the land area and 3 percent of the population of the country, are one of the most complex spots in Asia with over 200 ethnic groups, languages, dialects, and their own faiths and practices that constantly create conflicts of interest. Despite being linked with the mainland by just twenty-two km, the northeastern states share a 1,600 km-long common border with Myanmar. Moreover, the basic necessities of the northeastern states were obtained from Myanmar even before the legalization of trade in 1995. These facts make Myanmar an important actor in AEP projects.¹⁰

The China Factor in Myanmar

China has been a demonstrably hostile neighbor for India since the Sino-India War of 1962, the hostility most evident in China's provision of military assistance to Pakistan from time to time. Besides, China is the closest partner and supporter of the military junta of Myanmar. The increasing Chinese economic influence in Asean countries, particularly in Myanmar, alarmed India, and in response India intensified its trade competition with China by harnessing Myanmar's significant oil and natural gas reserves, seeking to establish a major and stable source of energy for its growing domestic needs and reducing its dependence on the oil-rich Middle East. In addition, China also acquired contracts to exploit 2.88 trillion to 3.56 trillion cubits of natural gas in the A-1 Shwe field in the Rakhine (Arakan) State, and to develop naval and surveillance installations along Myanmar's coast and the Coco Islands. It is evident that India would face extreme risks if it continues to remain a silent spectator to Chinese trade activities in the Rakhine state, which is geographically contiguous to Mizoram state of India.¹¹ In

response to Chinese interventions, India has vigorously pursued the two projects in the extreme south of Myanmar, mentioned above. It should also be noted that the development of the AEP projects in the area requires the provision of adequate security. Alarmed by the interventionist policy of China, India started diplomatic and trade engagement with the military junta of Myanmar out of diplomatic and security compulsions.

The new diplomatic and trade engagement with Myanmar compelled India to activate the two dormant projects—the Kolodyne Hydro-Electric Project II (or Kolodyne HEP II) and the Kolodyne Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP) from snail speed to a quicker pace. The Kolodyne HEP II and KMMTTP have been a long term plan of the government of India that was initiated a decade ago, for which survey work has been done but without much progress. The two dormant projects are being activated again largely due to the Chinese factor.

The Significance of Mizoram in India's Act East Policy

In pursuit of the LEP/AEP, the Government of India initiated Nine projects in Myanmar and seven projects in Northeast India. The six projects in Myanmar are:

1. Tamu-Kaletwa-Kalemyo road (160 km).
2. Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project.
3. ASDL Project.
4. ISRO Data Processing Centre, Yangon.
5. Truck Supply (Tata company).
6. ONGC Videsh Limited, GAIL and ESSAR project in energy sector.



The seven projects in the North East India are:

1. Kolodyne Hydro-Electric Project II (Kolodyne HEP II).
2. Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP).
3. Asian Highway.
4. Asian Railway Link.
5. Natural Gas pipeline.
6. Guwahati-Ho Chi Minh City Flight.
7. Imphal-Hanoi Flight.

Out of the seven mega projects of the AEP in Northeast India, two projects, namely, Kolodyne Hydro-Electric Project II (HEP II) and Kolodyne Multi Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP) are located in Mizoram. Among these projects, work has been undertaken actively only in the KMMTTP. Besides these, a Land Custom Station (LCS) has been functioning in Zokharthar since 1995 for border trade. Two more Land Custom Stations are proposed to be opened at Zorinpui at Lawngtlai District at the border with Rakhine state of Myanmar and at Tlabung in Lunglei District at the border with Bangladesh. The two mega projects of the LEP/AEP and the Zokhawthar LCS in Mizoram are discussed below.

Kolodyne Hydro-Electric Project II

The Kolodyne River flows into Mizoram from Myanmar, first turning west and then southward within Mizoram and reenters Myanmar. The Kolodyne HEP II is a project that aims to generate 460 megawatts of power, to connect the Kolodyne River with Port Sittwe in Myanmar by making it navigable from a favorable spot, and to supply good drinkable water to the people of the area. The Kolodyne HEP II Project is expected to harness the potential of the Kolodyne River with multi-purpose utilization which should be beneficial for people of the area.

The Government of India intensified its move to cooperate with Myanmar in pursuance of its LEP programs, and a key agenda for appeasing Myanmar in this regard is the joint exploitation of Myanmar's gas deposits in Rakhine (Arakan) state, the multi-modal project for development of highway, an inland waterway linking Kolodyne and Sittwe Port, and hydro-electric power generation from a dam on the Kolodyne river.⁸ The project's estimated cost is about Rs. 5,000 crore and the work has been undertaken by the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC). The Detailed Project Report (DPR) in this regard was submitted by the Central Water Commission (CWC) in 2008 but it was not found to be authentic, and as a result, the CWC is preparing another DPR which automatically delays the work to be undertaken by the NTPC.

The NTPC started functioning in the area by opening an office at Lawngtlai in October 2009 but the actual work could not begin due to delay in submission of the DPR by the CWC. The Kolodyne HEP II requires more than two hundred engineers which comprise of the chief engineer, superintendent engineer, executive engineer, assistant engineer, sub-divisional officer, and junior engineers. Besides the qualified engineers, the projects may also require skilled workers such as carpenters, welders, fitters, mechanics, electricians, gas cutters, and grinders. Under the rules, only certificate holders would be given preference even for appointment to various skilled labor posts. It is high time for the people of the area to upgrade their skills because even if a person is a highly skilled worker, he/she may not get appointed if they do not have the required certificate.⁹ Engineers of the NTPC

⁸ L.T. Pudaite, *Mizoram and Look East Policy* (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2010), 2-3, and 186-187.

⁹ Documents collected by the author at the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) office, in Lawngtlai, Mizoram on November 10, 2010.



frequently gave adverse reports for the closure of the Kolodyne HEP II by citing various reasons such as bad transport and communications, non-availability of stones and sand in the area to sustain the project, high cost of transportation, isolated location of the place, and unfriendly environment. The Government of India, however, has taken a decision to complete the project for reasons of boosting economic development and geostrategy.

Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP)

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of the Government of India entered into a Framework Agreement with the Government of Myanmar in April 2008 to facilitate the implementation of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport project (KMMTTP). The project was initiated in October 10, 2010 in Mizoram in order to enhance India's LEP/AEP. As Mizoram shares an international boundary of 404 km with Myanmar, the project also aims to provide an alternate outlet to landlocked Northeast India which is heavily dependent on the narrow 'Chicken's Neck' at Siliguri. It aims to link Kolkata and other Eastern Indian ports through coastal shipping to Sittwe on the Arakan coast in Myanmar, thereby enhancing connection through the Kaladan River and route to Mizoram on the Indian side. It would facilitate the movement of cargo across the Indo-Myanmar border, connecting Kolkata with Sittwe seaport in Rakhine State in Myanmar by the sea route. In Myanmar, it will link Sittwe seaport to Paletwa in Chin State via the Kaladan river boat route, and then from Paletwa by road to Mizoram state in India.¹⁰

¹⁰ Jonathan Zodontluanga, "An Analysis of Development in Mizoram with Special Reference to the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and



The author riding a speed boat on the Kolodyne River on February 5, 2021. Photo by the courtesy of the author.

The KMMTTP road project aims to construct an international standard highway passing through the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) area via Aoc Veng in Lawngtlai District and reaching as far as Akyab in Myanmar. The road would establish connectivity between Indian ports and Sittwe port in Myanmar through riverine transport and road links in Mizoram. The distance of the road is estimated to be 117 km within Mizoram from Lawngtlai to Myanmar border, and it is about 222 km from the border to Akyab. The DPR for this project was prepared by the Rail India Technical and Economic Service (RITES) and the work is being undertaken by two road construction companies, RDS (Rameshwar Dayal & Sons) and ARSS (Anil Rajesh Subhash Sunil) Exhibition Project Limited. The estimated initial cost of building the

Zokhawthar Border Trade,” paper presented by in the ICSSR (IMPRESS) National Seminar on “Governance and Development in Mizoram: Role of Multiple Stakeholders and Public Policies,” the Department of Political Science, Mizoram University on May 9-10, 2019.



highway as a commercial gateway between India and Southeast Asia is Rs. 746 crore.¹¹

The construction of the highway was supposed to have been completed within four years, but the project has missed its completion deadline for the third consecutive time due to delay in the work. The latest deadline was December 30, 2018 which was further delayed by three years due to resistance by the landowners of the area who have demanded cash compensation. The latest disturbance was a “bandh” called by the landowners which caused a delay of 390 days. The other problems facing this project are shortage of materials such as inadequate stone quality, diesel shortage at Lawngtlai petrol pump, and prolonged rainy season in Mizoram from April to October. The erratic conditions have led to an increase in the outlay of the budget from Rs 575.69 crore to Rs 1,011.52 crore which has been revised twice. Besides, work on widening the National Highway 54 from Lawngtlai to the state’s border with Assam, covering a distance of 515 km via Aizawl and Kolasib, is yet to start. Thus, even if the KMMTTP is developed to its maximum, Mizoram and other Northeastern states will not be able to make use of its full potential if National Highway 54 connecting the KMMTTP road to the main hub of Mizoram is not developed properly.¹²

Zokhawthar Land Custom Station

Under the agreement signed between India and Myanmar in 1994, border trade in locally produced commodities was allowed with 5 percent duty. To facilitate trade, the Government of India set up a Land Custom Station in Moreh (Manipur) and in Zokhawthar (Mizoram). When Indo-Myanmar border trade became operational with effect from

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

April 12, 1995, trade was limited to 22 items. In 2008, 18 more items were added to the list, and a further 22 items in 2012. Thus, the total number of trade items were extended to sixty-two. From January 2016, the import and export items were categorized as free trade or normal regular trade, which the Zokhawthar Land Custom Station is well equipped to handle with a weigh bridge, plant quarantine building, and a tollgate. The Composite LCS in Zokhawthar, officially inaugurated by Nirmala Sitharaman, then Union Minister of State for Commerce and Industry on March 25, 2015, accommodates the Agriculture, Central Customs, Police, and Immigration Departments, and a branch of the State Bank of India. Customs personnel at the LCS regulate trading activity employing six staff in the customs department with one superintendent, two inspectors, and three havildars. The Zokhawthar Transport Union mostly handles and carries the items from the border bridge up to Mualkawi village; from Mualkawi, the Champhai Truck Union carries the goods to different parts of the state. According to a Customs report, border trade generated Rs 8,734,000 in the 2017-18 financial year.

Though the required export/import infrastructure is in place, many of these lie in non-operational or non-functional mode. The Indo-Myanmar Friendship Border Bridge is unable to carry heavy loads of more than fifteen tonnes. Besides, lack of testing facilities for food products in Mizoram often creates problems as the nearest testing unit available is in Imphal. The State Bank of India branch at the Zokhawthar LCS is unable to provide the foreign exchange required as it lacks advanced payment facilities. Road infrastructure and connectivity between Zokhawthar and Champhai as well as Zokhawthar and Khawmawi (Myanmar) and beyond is still in a bad condition. Also, the people in the border areas generally lack awareness about Indo-

yanmar trade and about the Look East/Act East Policy, and there is a lack of good internet facilities, and skilled workforce in those areas. Unregulated or uncontrolled labor/worker unions like Zokhawthar Transport Union, Champhai Truck Union, and Mutia Associations—formed by workers or mutias of the area—often creates problems in trade activities in the border area.¹³



The author at the last border post on the boundary with Rakhine State, Myanmar at Zocchachhuah (Zorinpui) border post on February 5, 2021. Photo by the courtesy of the author.

¹³ Author's field visit to Zokhawthar, Champhai District Mizoram, and to Tiau, Chin State, Myanmar on October 17, 2018.

Proposed Land Custom Station at Tlabung and Zorinpui

There is proposal to open a Land Custom Station at Tlabung (Demagiri), Lunglei District at the border with Bangladesh but it has not been implemented as yet. This route happens to be the traditional trade route that people from both sides of the border have used since the pre-colonial era, which was used for trade and communication even during the colonial era, however the situation became complex after independence because it was separated by an international boundary. The border trade is legal now through the LCS, but even before it was legalized border villages carried on trading because the people were from the same ethnic group and did not have any problem interacting with each other. The proposal for opening an LCS at Tlabung will be beneficial for local people on both sides of the border and it will also enhance the official border trade.

There is also a proposal to open an LCS at Zorinpui (Zochachhuah) at the last border point of the KMMTTP road in Lawngtlai District bordering Rakine State of Myanmar. As the KMMTTP road will be passing through it, it is a viable location for opening the LCS. Zorinpui is located at a distance of about 100 km from Lawngtlai, and Sittwe is about 222 km from Zorinpui. As it is likely to be a busy international highway after the completion of the KMMTTP road, the proposed LCS seems to be commercially and diplomatically useful from a strategic point of view. The proposal, however, still lies on paper and it is not yet implemented.¹⁴

¹⁴ Author's field visit to the Zorinpui border post at Lawngtlai District, Mizoram on February 5, 2021.



The author at the KMMTTP Road on February 5, 2021. Photo by the courtesy of the author.

Strategic Role of Mizoram in India's Act East Policy

As Mizoram shares a 404 km international boundary with Myanmar, and 318 km with Bangladesh, the local people on both sides of the border are continuously engaged in trade. Border commerce began in the form of village trade in the pre-colonial era because people inhabiting the border areas happened to be from the same ethnic stock. It is evident that tribes of the Zo ethnic group inhabit both sides of the border separating India and Myanmar, particularly in Mizoram and Chin State. Mizoram's districts of Lawngtlai, Saiha, Hnahthial, and Champhai have a common border with Chin State, an area inhabited on both sides of the border by tribes of the same Zo ethnic group that are related genealogically, linguistically, socially, culturally, and religiously. People on both sides have maintained border trade since

pre-colonial times. Likewise, kindred tribes of the Zo ethnic group, namely, Bawm (Bawmzo), Pang (Pangkhu), Miria, and Lusei (Lushai) inhabit the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and there is a large Chakma population in Chittagong as well. As these tribes inhabit both sides of the border, they have maintained trade and socio-cultural relations, whether or not there was official border trade. The significant role of Mizoram in India's Act East Policy is evident in these trading relationships.¹⁵

The location of two important projects, namely, the Kolodyne Hydro-Electric Project II and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project raise the significance of Mizoram in India's Act East Policy. The Kolodyne HEP II is expected to harness the potentiality of the Kolodyne River with multi-purpose utilization which should be beneficial for people of the area. To some extent due to the external factor, the Government of India intensified its move to cooperate with Myanmar by pursuing the projects under its LEP/AEP.

The first political leader of Mizoram who had the vision to harness hydro-electricity from the Kolodyne (Chhimtuipui) River was Brigadier T. Sailo, a former Chief Minister of Mizoram, but he could not accomplish his vision. Although the NTPC started functioning in Lawngtlai in 2009, the Kolodyne HEP II could be effectively implemented, indicating that the successful completion of the project requires the cooperation of the state government, local authorities, civil society, and local people of the state. As Myanmar is a significant actor

¹⁵ Jangkhongam Doungel and David Lalmuankima, "Problems and Prospects of the Look East Policy projects in the Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram—A Critical Analysis," paper presented by Dr Jangkhongam Doungel at the U.G.C. sponsored National Seminar on Development Constraints in North East India, organized by the Department of Political Science, Government J. Buana College, Lunglei, Mizoram, March 14-15, 2012.



in the completion of the Kolodyne HEP II and the KMMTTP, the Government of India has been appeasing Myanmar in different ways. The main agenda for appeasing Myanmar is the joint exploitation of Myanmar's gas deposit in Rakhine state, the multi-modal project for development of highways, the inland waterway on the Kolodyne River, Sittwe Port, and hydro-electric power generation from a dam on the Kolodyne River. The KMMTTP also has three components: building the Sittwe port, making the Kolodyne River navigable up to Mizoram, and developing highway connectivity from the Indian border of Mizoram.

Besides the Kolodyne HEP II and KMMTTP, a Land Custom Station has been functioning in Zokhawthar since 1995, which is the only officially recognized border trade between Mizoram with Myanmar at this juncture. Two more LCSs are proposed to be set up at Tlabung and Zorinpui. As a result, Mizoram has a significant role in the success of India's Act East Policy which is expected to unleash the potential of the northeastern states to serve as the Indian gateway to the Asean countries.

It is evident that if India remains a silent spectator it would be detrimental to its interests after the escalation of Chinese trade activities in the Rakhine State of Myanmar which is geographically contiguous to Saiha and Lawngtlai districts of Mizoram. Some natural problems may also emerge alongside the LEP projects such as increasing smuggling and cross-border crime, and illegal arms and drug trade that the grassroots administration may not be able to effectively combat. If timely and appropriate steps are not taken both by the state and central government, it would negatively affect the marginalized communities who are inhabiting the strategically located international border areas. On the positive side, the AEP projects may open Mizoram to Southeast Asia, and shorten the distance between

Northeast India and mainland India. The geostrategic location of Mizoram has organically increased its significance in the India's Act East Policy, and this reality should be recognized and accommodated.

Conclusion

The framing and implementation of the Look East and Act East Policy, driven by globalization, privatization, and liberalization, is an essential element of Indian foreign policy, whose vitality is demonstrated in six projects in Myanmar and seven projects in Northeast India. Two of the seven projects in the northeast—Kolodyne HEP II and the KMMTTP—are located in Lawngtlai District of Mizoram. The ongoing Act East Policy projects in Mizoram are arguably a direct outcome of appeasing the Myanmar against Chinese influence, however a satisfactory result in this regard has not yet been achieved. The Government of India has taken its own time in framing, implementing, and enforcing the Act East Policy projects only after careful analysis from different angles. The policy is being pursued not only due to the pressure and demand of political parties of the northeast for socio-economic development of the people of the area, but also due to reasons of regional geostrategy. Arguably, the use of the AEP as a tool of geostrategy outweighs the dimension of economic development of the northeast.

Moreover, it is doubtful whether a change in nomenclature from “look” to “act” has really helped in further activating the projects. The completion of the KMMTTP has been delayed for seven years, and work on the Kolodyne HEP II has not yet started. The Zokhawthar LCS is not fully developed and the proposed LCSs at Tlabung and Zorinpui are not yet taken up. If the National Highway connecting Assam to KMMTTP, and Aizawl to Champai Road, is not developed at least to a double-lane



road, it is unlikely that the KMMTTP, Kolodyne HEP II, and Zokhawthar LCS will be utilized by the people of Northeast India in general and Mizoram in particular. The state of Mizoram plays a crucial role in helping forge tangible diplomatic and commercial ties not only between India and Myanmar, but also beyond.

Note on the Author

Jangkhongam Dounge is Professor of Political Science at Mizoram University in Aizawl. He is currently a Fulbright Scholar based at the University of Cincinnati. He was born in Puleiyang Village in Saikul Subdivision, Kangpokpi District, Manipur. He did his MA from Manipur University, Imphal, and obtained his PhD degree from the same university in 2005. He began his teaching career as a lecturer in Bethany Christian College, Churachandpur in April 1996, was faculty in the Department of Political Science, Government Lawngtlai College from May 1998 to July 2012, and then he joined the Department of Political Science, Mizoram University in July 2012 as an Associate Professor and has served as the Head of Department. He is now a member of the Mizoram Local Government (Panchayati Raj) Drafting Committee. Some of his major books are: *Evolution of District Council Autonomy in Mizoram* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2010); *Ram Darthlalang, Socio-Political Issues in the Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2013); *Lai Chieftainship and its Impact in Politics* (New Delhi: Balaji Publications); and *Autonomy Movements and the Sixth Schedule in North East India* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2016).