



International Journal of Research in Finance and Management

IJRFM 2018; 1(1): 77-79

Received: 03-01-2018

Accepted: 06-02-2018

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Academic tourism: A pathway to international politico-economic relations amongst ASEAN countries and north east India

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Abstract

The concept of MICE tourism plays an important role in promoting tourism anywhere in the world if and when one tries to connect countries. The first step of requirement is to have meetings, events, conferences, incentives, etc. in order to exchange the Socio-Cultural and economic values of the two countries (For eg. Sangai festival, Hornbill festival are good examples of such kind of events). International conference at any given ASEAN countries are the good example of MICE tourism. This paper is an attempts to explore the basic fundamentals of the en-route requirement between two countries.

Keywords: Academic tourism, ASEAN, MICE, Myanmar, North East India

Introduction

Manipur is the gateway of India towards ASEAN countries, cultural fraternity of unexplored economic potentials of Myanmar is the key ingredient of India's Look East policy after the economic breakdown of western countries. In the Tourism development the concept of MICE tourism has vital role to promote the tourism anywhere of the world. If and when we try to connect countries the first step towards mutual fraternity is to have Meetings, Incentives, Conference, Events (MICE) so that the socio-cultural and economic values of the two countries can be exchanged. For example Sangai Festival, Hornbill Festival are good examples of such kinds of events. International Conference at any given ASEAN Country is the good example of MICE tourism. Since November 2010 elections Myanmar government has undertaken a series of political and economic reforms as part of its efforts to achieve the vision of becoming a modern democratic and developed nation by 2030 (Wikipedia retrieved 2019). Myanmar is the largest country in mainland South-East Asia covering an area of 676,000 thousand square kms. The country's proximity to Asia's largest and fastest growing markets offers great opportunity for Myanmar to become the land-link between China, India and the Asian Countries.

The NE region of India could not utilize the opportunities opened up through the Look East Policy due to weak economic base and lack of proper infrastructure despite the fact that when the rest of India has benefitted much from the engagement with ASEAN. In order to address this problem, conceptualization of a Road-map in terms of projects that can benefit the NE region must be undertaken. Academic Tourism could be one of the guiding documents which could be implemented in a short period as desirable. In the recent times US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter has rightly pointed out in his speech ahead of his visit to India saying that the United States is looking forward for new ways to complacent India's Act East Policy by finding meaningful areas of co-operation in the Asia-Pacific (Peoples Chronicles 2015). This statement should be viewed positively by India including NE region. Moreover, the Defense Secretary further elaborated on the issues regarding Act East Policy that United States want a shared regional architecture that is strong enough to ensure that all Asia-Pacific people and nations have the opportunity to rise and continue to rise in the future.

The Term Act-East being first popularized by US Secretary of the State Hillary Clinton in speech during her maiden visit to India in July 2011 (Paranmeshwaran, p-2014), in which she encouraged new development not to just look East but to engage East and act East. At

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the Summit of the first ever ASEAN-India summit of the South East Asian leaders, Prime Minister Modi highlighted specific recommendations to ASEAN-India Economic relations over the next few years and invites ASEAN countries to participate in India's ongoing economic transformation. New Delhi's strongest partner in the region Myanmar, only Asian country a borderland. Burmese President Thein Sein reviewed key infrastructure projects such as India-Myanmar, Thailand tri-lateral highway and the Kaladan Transport Project. Myanmar icon Aung San Swu Kyi acknowledge a warm welcome saying India as her second home. Thus, a new era of Act-East policy has begun in India with heralding of economic development, industrialization and trade (Wikipedia retrieved 2015).

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj during her recent foreign visits has articulated the need for an Act-East Policy forcefully in a way where Look East is no longer adequate but we need to Act East Policy (retrieved 28th May, 2015). Commerce, culture and connectivity are the three pillars of India's robust engagement with ASEAN in the economic areas. Indian Asian relations are poised to scale new frontiers. Thus, India's Look East Policy has morphed into a pro-active Act East Policy which accelerated across the board engagement between the two growth Policies of a vibrant Asia. Prime Minister Modi seems to have taken pragmatic view of its Security and Economic concerns and formulated a well calibrated strategy by receiving primacy in Modi's government right from the beginning in realization of economic and strategic importance of the region. During the 12th Indian Summit India's Co-operation in the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) and ASEAN coordinating centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management Centre has lauded, embarked on new economic journey, focusing on infrastructure manufacturing, trade, agriculture, skill-development, urban renewal and smart cities. However, Modi's policy was strongly objected by Assam's Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi questioning that how could it fulfil its promises like generating more employment avenues, attracting investments, and creating industries in the region when the NE Industrial Investment and promotion policy was suspended by it (Times of India, 2015).

Looking through SWOT Perspectives Strength

NE India has high strength of Human Resource Potential in the country where the neighbouring countries has not yet possessed. For example the Information Technology, medical, higher education and man power etc. Geographical proximity including border trade. Manipur is the gateway of India towards ASEAN countries. The various unexplored economic potentials of Myanmar is the key ingredient of India's Look East Policy after the economic breakdown of western countries. One can well identify the establishments of various institutions in the neighbouring country where some students from Mandalay were accommodated with free admission at MIMS (Manipur Institute of Management Studies), Manipur University. Shija Hospital and Research Institutes (SHRI) has also been rendering yoman's job to the people of Myanmar by providing free medical facilities to the patients as the people does not have excess to all these

modern equipment. Regarding border trade there is huge availability of resources. An agreement was signed on 21st January 1994 on Border Trade between India and Myanmar to enable locally produced commodities to be traded as per prevailing customary practices on both sides. The agreement envisages that border trade be taking place through custom post at Moreh and Zowkhathar in Mizoram corresponding to Tamu and Rhi in Myanmar (Wikipedia, retrieved 28th May 2015). The country's coastline running along the eastern side of the Bay of Bengal has huge potential to become an alternative international trade to Asia, by passing the longer routes through the streets of Malacca. The development of its port can see Myanmar becoming a regional trade and transport hub. Since 2010 November, election Myanmar Government has undertaken series of economic and political reforms as part of its effort to achieve the vision to becoming a modern democratic and develop nation by 2030. Once significant development in Myanmar is the passing of the new foreign investment law with the sole expectations to encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Myanmar with the key feature of permitting 100% ownership foreign companies except for certain activities designated as restricted or prohibited.

Weakness

There are so many weak points on the path of Myanmar and the NE-India. Regarding the restrictions of permit system many Myanmar and Thai people could not visit their neighbouring countries like Manipur and NE-India for tourism and medical treatment due to the Restricted Area Permit Systems (Agarwal. R.C, retrieved 29th May 2015) and inadequate road and transport system. Myanmar's transport sector is considerably underdeveloped for the country's size, population and potential. The institutional structure for Myanmar's transport sector is quite complicated as there is no proper single agency with clear oversight of the sector. There's no formal co-ordinating platform to develop an overall strategy for the sector and no clear lines of responsibility within the fragmented institutional structure. The existing cross-border road links are limited and poor in quality and as such there is strong demand for the expansion and development between the various regions in the country the government has to prioritise rural-city connectivity and upgradation of existing road infrastructure. However, these are all far from execution and implementation. Ignorance of the people regarding the socio-economic potentials of each country due to long gap of 65 years of unlocked unilateral system of governance between the two countries makes it further difficult to develop smooth infrastructure and enhance the road link connectivity.

Opportunity

Since 1991 India has new policy of Look East Policy and has given good opportunities in different aspects by opening the Globalization and triple-PPP system of partnership in India. By taking the opportunities of Look east Policy, the people of North-East can have various economic steps by using different opportunities. Therefore, tourism is the first and priority steps which need to be taken into account for exploring the potentials of each country. Only through tourism can we understand each other the basic orientation

programmes of host country and the guest together. It is the only opportunity to know each other which and where we need to stand. There are various opportunities that we can showcase activities such as;

Cultural Exchange Programmes

During the Prime Ministership of Manmohan Singh, India and Myanmar emphasized on the centrality of culture in further deepening the close bonds between the people of India and Myanmar and sign a Cultural-Exchange programme for the Look East Policy (LEP). With the main objective of promoting cultural exchanges between the North eastern states and the bordering areas of Myanmar the two leaders welcomed the formalization of contexts between the Indian and the Myanmar think tanks and academic institutes and urges scholars to participate actively and exchange views in academic events by extending support for setting up of schools with technical assistance. Cultural events such as Indian classical music concerts, book reading, classical cultural dance are being organized from time to time.

Threats

Some of the glaring weakness and obstacles hindering the smooth multilateral relations in the ASEAN countries;

1. Inconvenient border governance of Union Government.
2. Lack of transparency regarding border conflict between Myanmar and Indian Government.
3. Border control by the non-governmental machineries from both the countries.
4. Disturbances from undesirable pressure groups.
5. Illegal taxation of toll tax by the insurgency groups operating within the countries.
6. Ethnic violence
7. Unconstitutional activities of the Indian Army and Border Security Forces.
8. Inefficient political leaders and high handedness of the bureaucratic activities of governance.

Conclusion

Governments should not make huge investments to break the geographical isolation and rescue the communication bottlenecks from the states. Maintenance of a friendly investment atmosphere is very important for attracting foreign investors. A good relationship should be built between the states and the ASEAN countries. Restoration of peace and tranquility between states across the borders should be resolved amicably at the political level so as to ensure a lasting peace between states and the regions. The attraction of foreign tourists and investors is of utmost importance for the development of international politico-economic relations between ASEAN countries and NE India. Besides formulation of proper tourism development policy and people's co-operation and consciousness is the need of the hour. Providing number of good hotels for fooding and lodging will pave an avenue for holding events to further lead to economic development. Manipur has high potential to progress in the near future. Proper resolutions for border ethnic conflicts and illegal immigrants should be properly checked by the state government so that it does not hinder the pavement for smooth relations between ASEAN countries and NE particularly Manipur acting as the

gateway to ASEAN countries.

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