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# ROLE OF NORTH EAST IN INDIA'S ACT EAST POLICY

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ORGANISED BY CENJOWS  
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The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a pivotal moment in global geopolitics, impacting nations worldwide, including India. The collapse of this strong ally for India led to a shift in its foreign policy, leading to the formulation of the Look East Policy under the leadership of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. The primary goal of this policy was to enhance India's economic, diplomatic, cultural, and trade relations with countries situated to the East of India, particularly those in Southeast Asia.

In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government elevated this initiative to 'Act East Policy' from 'Look East Policy', a more proactive and comprehensive strategy aimed at strengthening India's ties with its Eastern neighbours. The central aim of this policy is to boost India's engagement with countries in the Southeast region, while strategically utilizing the North Eastern states of India as a gateway to foster these relationships.

The North Eastern region of India, often referred to as the "Seven Sisters" (comprising Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur, and Meghalaya) along with Sikkim, hold significant geopolitical importance. These states share borders with several countries such as Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and China, making them crucial for India's relations with its Eastern neighbours. Despite this, there remains a sense of neglect among the people of the North East, who feel disconnected from the rest of the country at times. For India to fully realize its Act East Policy, it is essential to integrate the North East more effectively, as it serves as the region's gateway for trade and diplomatic outreach to Southeast Asia and beyond.

A vital geographic feature, the Siliguri Corridor, also known as the 'Chicken's Neck', connects mainland India with the North East, further underscoring the region's strategic significance. This narrow land passage is a critical link, and ensuring its security and development is paramount for improving connectivity within India and with neighbouring countries.

In terms of regional geopolitics, India shares borders with several countries to the east. These include Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and China. While India enjoys good diplomatic relations with most of these countries, challenges remain, particularly with China and Pakistan. India's relationship with China has been fraught with trust issues, especially in light of China's failure to honour previous agreements and its ongoing territorial disputes with India. Similarly, tensions with Pakistan and its influence over Bangladesh have strained relations, particularly after the rise of Mohammed Younus's government in Bangladesh, which has increasingly been swayed by Pakistan's foreign policy interests.

To strengthen its Act East Policy, India must deepen its understanding of the North East region, including its demographic and topographic characteristics, and its historical and cultural context. This will not only help address internal issues of North East but will also create a more robust framework for India's regional diplomacy. By engaging and empowering the people of the North East, India can unlock the full potential of this vital region, making it a key player in India's broader strategy to enhance ties with the South Pacific and East Asian countries.

In conclusion, the North East region is central to India's Act East Policy, and fostering better relations with these states will be crucial for achieving India's broader foreign policy and economic goals in the eastern part of the world.