

# **FACT SHEET OF ACT EAST POLICY AFFAIRS (AEPA) DEPARTMENT**

## **PRELUDE:**

- Act East Policy Affairs (AEPA) Department is a new Department of the State Government. It was set up in 2017 by an Executive Order in the form of a Notification [*vide* No. AR 94/2016/Pt-1/2 Dated Dispur, the 22nd May, 2017] of the Administrative Reforms & Training Department; with the avowed intention of capitalizing on the *avant-garde* Act East Policy of the Central Government under the perspective that the North Eastern States would potentially be the cutting edge of the country's engagement with its neighbours in the ASEAN and BBIN blocs.
- The slated objectives of the Act East Policy Affairs Department are:
  1. **Socio-Cultural Exchange with ASEAN and BBIN countries** – taking into account the similarities in socio-cultural patterns, anthropological/ ethnic backgrounds, and proto-religious practices between peoples of NE States and the aforementioned countries;
  2. **Economic Integration with ASEAN and BBIN countries** – *involving* seamless trade and commerce [*including* creation of Free Trade Zone and Integrated Border Townships], *as well as* technical and industrial collaboration;
  3. **Seamless Connectivity with ASEAN and BBIN countries** – on the lines of *Panchapath* (Roadways, Railways, Airways, Waterways and Information-ways) espoused by Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, including multi-modal and fast transportation system and effective telecommunication mechanism; and
  4. **Hassle-free Movement of People with ASEAN and BBIN countries** – *through* opening of consulates/ Asst. High Commissioners' Offices of these countries in Guwahati, and having facilities for Visa-Free Travel/ Visa on Arrival for *bona-fide* people [*viz.* traders, officials and tourists].
- The designated role of the Act East Policy Affairs Department is 3 pronged: *viz.*
  - body effecting stakeholder integration,
  - mechanism for policy generation and documentation, and
  - agency seeking expeditious implementation of key projects.

### **FUNCTIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES OF AEPA DEPARTMENT:**

Based on that designated role, the functions delineated for the Department comprise –

- facilitating coordination with the different relevant Ministries/ Departments of the Central Govt. [viz. External Affairs, Commerce and Industry, DONER, Home Affairs, Railways, Road Transport and Highways, Shipping, Civil Aviation, Water Resources, Telecommunication, Electronics and Information Technology and Culture]; NITI Aayog, State Governments of other North Eastern States; academic, trade and cultural institutions; as well as stake-holder Departments and Agencies of Assam Government [viz. Industries & Commerce, Home, Border Areas, PWD (Buildings & NH), PWD (Roads), Transport, Water Resources, Information Technology, Education, Culture, Tourism, Finance and Transformation & Development] – for effective implementation of different facets of the Act East Policy – from the side of the State Govt.; and
- providing a single point system for policy generation and documentation, project implementation and performance assessment, and other related aspects of the Act East Policy *vis-à-vis* the State of Assam.
- acting as the nodal department of the Govt. of Assam for implementation of projects and works relating to the Act East Policy, and thereby act a catalyst in the accomplishment of the cherished objectives.

Through the aegis of the Department, the Govt. of Assam thus seeks to work together in a unified manner with the relevant Central Government Ministries, the Niti Aayog *as well as* the Governments of the other 7 North Eastern States – eschewing the Silo Vision mentality and imbibing the spirit of Cooperative Federalism – for making the region the platform for launching of the Act East Policy, rather than remain a peripheral entity for the rest of India.

### **DEPARTMENT RELATED WORKS UNDERTAKEN:**

Based on a high-powered meeting chaired by Hon'ble CM, the Department has taken up the following schemes:

- Organization of an interactive session involving the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Hon'ble Industry & AEPA Minister and senior officials with prominent citizens, academicians, eminent journalists and media persons regarding the Govt.'s work towards fulfilling Act East Policy.

- It was accomplished on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2017.
- Organization of a Special Session on North East India's Economic Ties with ASEAN and BBN Countries during the Global Investment Summit – Advantage Assam 2018.
  - It was accomplished on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2018.
  - It was attended by Ministers of 5 ASEAN & BBN countries, Hon'ble Chief Minister and Departmental Minister of Assam, Secretary (MoDoNER), Jt. Secretary (MEA – ASEAN ML Divn.), Country Director of Asian Development Bank, and moderated by CEO (NITI Aayog) Amitabh Kant.
  - The Session concluded with an ASEAN-Style Joint Handshake among the dignitaries.
- Making of presentation by AEPA, under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister, regarding its Action Plan to Gen. V.K. Singh (Retd.), MoS, MEA and Shri Jitendra Singh, MoS, DoNER & PMO. On being approved by the above Central Ministers and on incorporation of their suggestions (if any), making of that updated presentation by the Hon'ble Chief Minister before Shri Nripendra Misra, Principal Secretary to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India.
  - Its process of implementation has been initiated.
- Organization of a conclave involving major Central Ministers associated with the vision of Act East Policy and the Chief Ministers of all North Eastern States, along with representatives from NITI Aayog.
  - AEPA would submit the list of projects and other proposals for successful implementation of the Act East Policy in that Conclave.
  - Its process of implementation has also been initiated.

**PENDING ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED:**

- Setting up of a Think Tank involving eminent thinkers and policy-makers for charting the roadmap of Act East Policy. The Think Tank that is being set up under the aegis of the AEPA Deptt., would:
  - engage with similar policy think tanks across the entire South and South Asian region; and
  - devise policies and actionable points – taking care that the aspirations of the State and the region are respected and accommodated in the process.

- Preparation of a Cabinet Memorandum for approval of the State Cabinet –
  - establishing the Department as the Nodal Department for matters relating to the State's outreach to the neighbouring States and countries;
  - defining the objectives, role, modus operandi, functions and responsibilities in black and white.

### **ONGOING SCHEMES & EXTERNALLY AIDED PROJECTS:**

- Some of the major projects in the pipeline – which are being followed up by the Department on behalf of the State Govt. – comprise:
  - Establishment of direct flights between Guwahati and the major cities of ASEAN and BBN countries;
  - Construction of ASIAN Trilateral Highway project involving India, Myanmar and Thailand;
  - Kaladan project which would provide North Eastern India access to Sittwe Port of Myanmar;
  - Dredging of Brahmaputra, Barak and Kushiara rivers to ensure inland water connectivity to the ports of Bangladesh;
  - Establishment of consulates of ASEAN and BBN countries in Guwahati;
  - Digital connectivity to the North East India from the Cox Bazar terminal of Bangladesh; and
  - Establishment of smooth access to the Chittagong port both through the land/ road route as well as the river route.
  
- The projects are being implemented by other agencies. The Department is following up/ coordinating/ facilitating them on behalf of the State Govt.

### **OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES/ EPILOGUE:**

- The Department is still in its infancy. It therefore requires the continued support and cooperation of the State and Central Governments, the members of the academic and trade fraternity, and the citizenry in general.