1) **Introduction**
- The Act East Policy was set in motion by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the East Asia Summit in Myanmar in November 2014.
- India’s Act East Policy focuses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The policy has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions including establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation.

2) **Objective of "Act East Policy"**
- The Objective of "Act East Policy" is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels thereby providing enhanced connectivity to the States of North Eastern Region.
- The North East of India has been a priority in the Act East Policy (AEP).
- AEP provides an interface between North East India and the ASEAN region.
- Some of the major projects include Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, Rhi-Tiddim Road Project, Border Haats, etc.
- Apart from ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and East Asia Summit (EAS), India has also been actively engaged in regional fora such as BIMSTEC, Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).
- Closer cooperation in combating terrorism, collaborating for peace and stability in the region and promotion of maritime security based on international norms and laws are being pursued.

3) **Evaluation of Act East Policy (AEP)**
- The renewed focus of the AEP are evident in the extensive high-level visits—by India’s president, vice president, and prime minister to nine of the 10 ASEAN states—over the last 23 months.
- In addition to reviving the economic partnership, India has focused on promoting connectivity with other ASEAN states through Myanmar and Thailand.
- AEP has imparted greater vigor to India’s ties with ASEAN.
- Relations with ASEAN have become multi-faceted to encompass security, strategic, political, counterterrorism, and defense collaboration in addition to economic ties.
- AEP has sought to significantly expand its geographical coverage beyond ASEAN alone, to include other countries like Japan, Australia, Pacific Island nations, South Korea, and Mongolia.
- India’s partnership with Japan has witnessed the most dynamic growth.
- India’s AEP has also impacted relations with the United States.
- By aligning India’s Act East Policy with the U.S. pivot to Asia, India seeks to expand its geo-strategic space to contend with China’s growing assertiveness and foster balanced relations.

4) **Connectivity strategy for North-Eastern region.**
- There has to be a master plan for linking all the North-eastern states together with a network of road, rail and air links.
- Bangladesh is also increasingly open to reviving the old river navigation routes, which were the main transport links in undivided eastern India.
- India has recognized that success of AEP will be determined by its contribution to security and economic development of Northeast India.
5) **Road Connectivity and Trade**

- India helped Myanmar in completing 160 km of the Tamu–Kalewa–Kalemyo sector of the proposed Trilateral Highway that seeks to link India, Myanmar, and Thailand.
- By pursuing the Mekong–India Economic Corridor (MIEC) project, India seeks to get access to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.
- BCIM economic corridor, a highway linking Kolkata in India to Kunming in Yunnan province of China.
- The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, between India and Myanmar.
- Access to sea ports in Bangladesh that would link the North East to South East Asian countries, and also to mainland India.

6) **Concerns and Challenges**

- Better road connectivity need not lead to improved trade and economic development.
- Better connectivity can promote not only legal trade, but also prop up illegal trade in drugs, small arms, and human trafficking.
- Trade and business, not connected to the lives and to the day-to-day needs of the people, may prove to be counterproductive.
- Almost all the corridors proposed as part of the sub regional initiatives pass through ethnically volatile and militant prone areas.
- On the Indian side, the roads would pass through areas where the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), Naga, Kuki and Meitei militants are operating.
- One of the few mega biodiversity regions in the world might be impacted by pollution and fragmentation of habitat.
- All countries of the region, except China are dependent on external funding or are required to allocate significant proportion of their budgets for these projects, which is a tough task.

7) **Way Forward**

- India must continue to focus on further strengthening collaboration with ASEAN nations and others.
- Partners must work to promote economic revival, seek strategic cooperation to fight terrorism, and enhance maritime security and defense cooperation.
- Soft power such as Buddhism, tourism, people-to-people contacts, and cultural ties with the region must continue to be harnessed.
- Beyond, but linked to ASEAN, India must further strengthen strategic and economic ties with the U.S., Japan, Korea, Australia, and also with China.
- Important sectors like technology transfer, civilian nuclear cooperation, defence, and innovation should be given priority.
- Continuous engagement with China too is necessary to expand cooperation, particularly on the economic front.