

## SOUTHEAST ASIA: OUR FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITY

### Milestones in India's Look East Policy:-

- 1992 - Sectoral Dialogue Partner of Association of South Asian States (ASEAN).
- 1995 - Full Dialogue Partnership of ASEAN.
- 1996 - Membership of ASEAN Regional Forum.
- 1997 - Establishment of Bay of Bengal Initiative of Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).
- 2000 - Mekong-Ganga Co-operation begins.
- 2002 - First India ASEAN Summit.
- 2003 - Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Co-operation. India signs Treaty of Amity and Co-operation. Joint Declaration to Combat International Terrorism.
- 2005 - India becomes member of East Asia Summit.
- 2009 - Signing of India ASEAN Free Trade Agreement.
- 2010 - ASEAN Defence Minister Meeting Plus (ADMM PLUS) Security Meet, East Asia Summit.

### Background

India is in the immediate neighbourhood of ASEAN. She shares land and maritime borders with Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand. In fact, India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal are closer to some ASEAN states than to the Indian mainland. The southern tip of the islands is astride the vital commercial sea lanes between West Asia and South East Asia through which nearly 40 percent of the world's trade passes, but till recently South East Asia was hardly a foreign policy priority for New Delhi.

India's association with South East Asia can be traced back to

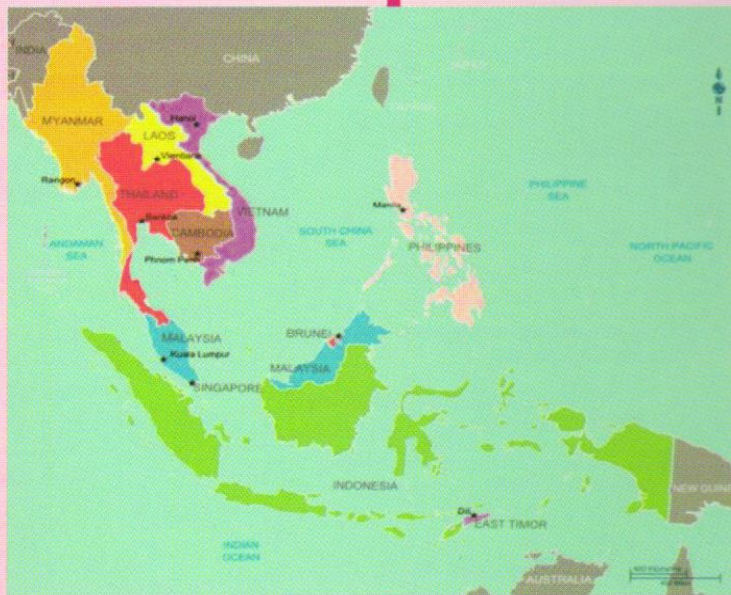
ancient times. These links however, were disrupted during the colonial interlude and were rediscovered during the freedom struggles in India and many countries of South East Asia. When one looks at South Asia regional interaction with India there are three distinct phases of interaction i.e. Pre independence, Cold War, and Post Cold War.

**Pre-independence.** During this phase, India inspired many nationalist movements in Southeast Asia. The Asian Relations Conference which took place in New Delhi during March-April 1947, brought together many leaders of the independence movements in Asia, and represented a first attempt of India to assert Asian unity. Our former PM Jawaharlal Nehru then welcoming the delegates said, "It is at this great moment that we meet here and it is the pride and privilege of the people of India to welcome their fellow Asians from other countries, to confer with them about the present and the future, and lay the foundation of our mutual progress, well-being and friendship."

It was an attempt to bring together the countries which like India were isolated from each other by the colonial rule. The conference was to rediscover and foster old links. However, regional events in South Asia then overtook such a grand initiative and India spent more time and energy in dealing with borders.

**Cold War.** The arrival of bipolar politics in Southeast Asia, the Vietnam crisis and India's close ties with the Soviet Union led to the adoption of divergent policies by both India and ASEAN. ASEAN was formed in 1967 during the Vietnam War

primarily to diffuse regional conflicts and to promote better relations between members. As Communist victories in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia worsened the already fragile



security situation of Southeast Asia, by 1976, ASEAN was forced to become an association with security as its main concern. The reunification of Vietnam and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia created another security dilemma in the region. On this, India's and ASEAN reactions were conflicting. While ASEAN chastised Vietnam, India supported Vietnam. New Delhi's non-aligned leaning discouraged it to join any grouping hence; New Delhi was initially reluctant to join this. The ASEAN later gave a cold shoulder to India both because of political reasons the Cold War considerations and the Pakistan factor. Both these factors are non-existent now.

## Change in Perception

**Post Cold War.** The end of the Cold War coincided with India's economic reforms. The expansion of the ASEAN to include the three Indo-Chinese countries of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, improvement in Indo-US relations and Sino-Indian cooperation all contributed towards more positive image of India in the ASEAN. ASEAN countries are now attracted by the economic opportunities that a huge market like India has offered after opening of its economy. Apart from the economic angle, the China factor too is weighing heavily in several ASEAN quarters particularly after emergence of South China Sea dispute as a major security concern. The economic and military rise of China and its assertive posture has even led to the renewed American interest in this strategically important region. President Obama while speaking in the Indian Parliament during his visit of India in Nov 10, declared that, "the United States is once again playing a leadership role in Asia---and re-engaging with regional organizations like ASEAN and joining the East Asia summit-organizations in which India is also a partner." He almost exhorted India for its low interest in the Southeast region by saying that, we want India to not only "look East," but India to "engage East" because it will increase the security and prosperity of all our nations. It is the west that recognised India's potential, long before India realized. They saw that India and China are going to be the predominant powers in time to come.

Jawaharlal Lal Nehru however, was well aware of India's strategic place in the region. He believed that "India is very curiously placed in Asia and her history has been governed a great deal by the geographical factor and cultural factors. Whichever problem in Asia you may take up, somehow or other India comes into the picture. Whether you think in terms of China or the Middle East or South East Asia, India immediately comes into the picture. It is so situated that because of past history, traditions etc, in regard to any major problem of a country or a group of countries of Asia, India has to be considered. Whether it is a problem of defence or trade or industry or other economic policy, India cannot be ignored". It is thus paradoxical despite with this belief and being from this part of the world, India stayed aloof from this area.

## Current Status

The end of the Cold War and disintegration of the former Soviet Union were major events of the 20th century. ASEAN which was

formed as a Cold War organization was aligned with the West in particular with the United States, Japan, and European countries who in some ways subordinated their economic and commercial interests for security needs. Since the end of the Cold War, the security perspective in the region has changed and these countries have been pursuing their economic and commercial interests much more vigorously, with adverse effect on ASEAN.

In post Cold War period, India's relations with the Western countries, particularly the US are marked with much greater mutual understanding of security and strategic interests. India has also demonstrated its willingness backed up by expanded strategic capability and political engagement to play a role beyond South Asia to which its adversaries have attempted to confine it in the past. The ASEAN which earlier gave a cold shoulder to India is keen to expand its relations with India. We need to make the best use of this opportunity. The current leadership in India too appears to have the will and same is reflected in our efforts to sign a free trade agreement on goods with the ASEAN grouping in 2009 and hope to sign FTA on services soon.

## Future Prospects

India's relations with South East Asia should have three fold objectives, one to strengthen bilateral relationships with member-states of ASEAN; to carve and institutionalise a close political and economic relationship with ASEAN and mutually address the security concerns of the region. Our "Look East Policy" which took shape in 1991 has undergone changes. ASEAN countries have also taken note of the rise of China and India. Being small, ASEAN countries are not in position to raise its voice against China which in the recent years has become more assertive after gaining military and economic clout. They look towards India to lend its voice. India faces a dilemma. Some time we are vocal of our concerns about threat from China at another time, we lower our voice on China. ASEAN observes this dichotomy in our policy. To blunt China's hegemonistic designs they have taken the issues to the multilateral forums like ADMM plus and East Asia Summit where apart from ASEAN members, other eight countries inclusive of China, USA, Russia and India were also invited with the intention to rein in China which now claims South China Sea as its core area of interest and has raised claims on several island territories in the region. US however, has rubbished its claims. From our perspective, two regions are important i.e. Myanmar with which we have longest land border adjoining our Northeast states and have great implication in on going insurgent movement in the region and other is Indo-China to which Vietnam belongs. It is interesting that Vietnam which fought US in fifties is now building its economy through close relations with US and is at the threshold of signing the nuclear deal with it. With US still tied down in Afghanistan and Iraq, gives an opportunity to India to play a more pro-active role in the region. In this context, it is pertinent to note Obama's call to India in his address in Indian Parliament during his state visit in Nov 10 that, India should upgrade its relation from "Looking East Asia" to "Engage East Asia". In Myanmar, we may not be in position to replace China which is attempting to gain access to the Indian Ocean region through Myanmar but, we still can be

equal partner in Myanmar's growth and development of infrastructure which could check Chinese influence in the region. With elections already held, which despite western criticism is a step forward towards democratisation of the country. Though US sanctions are still in place, but it is not as much opposed as before and even has tried to engage Myanmar in track II level. India could play a positive role in softening US stand some notches lower. Had US engaged Myanmar instead of punitive sanctions, the situation in Myanmar could have been vastly different than seen now.

India's South East engagement policy has strategic, defence political, cultural and economic implications.

**Strategic.** India's military might in the emergent Asian balance of power can not be ignored any longer. The Southeast Asian nations have now begun to look upon India as a power that could play a kind of 'balancing role' vis-à-vis China particularly after super powers influence in the region has waned leading to the convergence of strategic interests between India and ASEAN countries. Our efforts to forge close relations with US and South East Asian states have been perceived as encirclement by the Chinese Strategists as inimical to the Chinese interests. While India does not wish to be seen as a counterpoise to China in Southeast Asia, India's growing military and economic strength is also in Southeast Asia's interest and is necessary for peace and stability in Asia.

How East Asian and countries of Asia Pacific perceive China and India's rise? China till recently was viewed with admiration, is now being seen in fear as recent growing Chinese assertiveness and postures are perceived as unfriendly and have caused noticeable concerns in the Asia Pacific region. This is a recent change which till a year before did not exist. We had the President of Indonesia as chief guest for our Republic day is also an important factor. China is observing this but; we are doing this at the right juncture.

The emergence of India is being seen as a positive and benign partner by most East Asian and Asia Pacific countries and they want India to become an active participant and player in shaping the emerging the strategic structure of the Asia Pacific region. Japan realizes that with increasing influence of China, its own influence will be diminished therefore; Japan is keen that India plays a more proactive role in the region.

Pakistan and Afghanistan and other South Asian countries have potentially unstable polities. In each of these countries we see growing influence of China. It has also arrived in the Indian Ocean and flexing its muscles on the status of Arunachal Pradesh. India considers itself and China as partners and doesn't believe in the rivalry with any state. How we manage this relationship is an immediate challenge for the Indian diplomacy. No doubt rise of China is a long term strategic challenge for India. ASEAN shares this perception of India's role in the region and is keen to give strategic dialogue with India more impotence.

**Defence Cooperation.** India's commitment to its growing strategic engagement with the ASEAN has given impetus to the bilateral defence cooperation with the ASEAN member states and also in addressing non-traditional security challenges facing the region such as in combating terrorism, other translational crimes and in maritime security through exchange

of information and intelligence, capacity building and legal cooperation. India has also been supplying defence equipment, to many such countries and exploring other areas for defence cooperation. Other key components of cooperation have been visits of naval ships to South East Asian ports and vice-versa, conducting joint naval exercises, escorts of ships in the Andaman Sea and so on. Since 1995, Indonesia, along with Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia has been taking part in the biennial gathering of ships known as MILAN hosted by India. SAREX another bilateral Search and Rescue exercise conducted jointly with Indonesia since 1997 has been converted into a multilateral maritime exercise comprising of India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. The other core area of cooperation is defence training and supply of defence equipment. India is already training Malaysian pilots on the SU-30SKM aircraft since February 2008. To tackle the menace of maritime terrorism and piracy in and around the Malacca Strait, India had also proposed joint patrol in and around the Malacca Strait, to which Indonesia has shown its reluctance. Indian navy's proactive role in safeguarding the multilateral shipping across Gulf of Aden from the Somali's pirates should generate confidence in jointly tackling this menace.

**Political.** The purpose of political engagement with ASEAN countries is to establish and elevate bilateral ties to a higher plane. After becoming Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1992, India became a full Dialogue Partner in 1995, a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996, and a summit partner of ASEAN plus since 2002. India has also acceded to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) to emphasize its commitment to ASEAN's principles for inter-state relations. The linkages with ASEAN have been further strengthened by the recent ASEAN-India partnership agreement. Simultaneously, one can see a remarkable turn around in India's bilateral relations in particular with Singapore, Indo-China countries, Thailand, Myanmar and Indonesia. China, Japan, South Korea have ASEAN plus status while despite our Andaman and Nicobar group of islands being integral to this region, we are only the Dialogue partner of the ASEAN. It is the time that this relationship is upgraded.

**Cultural.** India's close civilization links with the region go back over a millennium. Historically, we have been linked by culture and commerce. The cross-fertilization of human experiences and the spiritual interaction between India and East Asia has left an indelible mark on the regional art, architecture, language and culture. The ancient relationship is best reflected in Angkor Wat a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu which marks the pinnacle of the Khmer art and civilisation. The Khmer rule covered not only the Cambodia but larger part of the Laos, Thailand and Malaysia. Further East on the Pacific coast, one finds the ruins of the Hindu kingdom Champa. In southern Indonesia, in central Java there are several Hindu and Buddhist temples. Even today, Buddhism Hinduism and Islam are the main religions in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam while Islam predominates in Indonesia and Malaysia. There were no wars or military conquests but as trade relation grew Indian art, culture, religious practices and way of life spread across the region through the process of cultural

osmosis. The revival of the Nalanda University as an international institution of excellence is an important initiative that underlines the ancient linkages of the two regions. Facilitation for the students to study in India as well as establishing institutions of learning with courses in English language in the ASEAN states would be welcomed. Chinese are engaged in similar ventures but, we have an advantage over the Chinese due to our mastery on English language which the students of ASEAN states are aspiring to master. Culture which is accepted as a soft-power could further promote interaction between India and countries of Southeast Asia. In recently held Jaipur Literature festival and India's Art summit, Delhi showcased the India's soft power with over one lac and 50'000 attendance respectively. The skilful and imaginative application of the soft power has a potential to put India on the global map.

**Economic.** Existing economic relations between India and ASEAN cover a wide range; involving merchandise trade, trade in service transactions, investments, tourism, and manpower flows. Mekong Ganga Cooperation and BIMSTEC were the first major economic initiative taken by India for encouraging larger engagement with the ASEAN. Today ASEAN is the fourth largest partner of India but, from ASEAN perspective we account 2.5% of its trade. Indo- ASEAN FTA of 2009 has created huge market for the goods but, it is not a strong point for India as trade surplus is in favour of ASEAN countries. Once Indo-ASEAN FTA on services arrives by 2020, the scale of trade could tilt in favour of India. ASEAN is a major trading partner for India and accounts for 9.42% of its global trade. In the financial year 2009-10, bilateral trade between India and ASEAN has surpassed US\$50 billion making the grouping India's fourth largest trading partner after the European Union, United States and China. Further India is looking forward to access the vast services market of ASEAN. India's total trade in services was \$137.50 billion in 2006. The corresponding figure for ASEAN is \$280.90 billion. Similarly, India lags ASEAN in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). In 2007-08 India attracted FDI of \$24.60 billion whereas; ASEAN member-countries attracted FDI totaling \$60.50 billion in the same year. There is a drop in investment in the subsequent year due to recession trend across the world. Singapore and Thailand have often expressed concern over excessive dependence on the Chinese market and the need to look at another big country like India more closely. This is the thinking that is getting reflected in the rest of South East Asia. ASEAN's limited domestic market has also increased the need to find economic partners with large markets like India. As India is not a direct competitor for ASEAN export led economies particularly in the manufacturing sector, the opportunities for the mutual gains are considerable. India's annual economic growth has averaged 7.5%. As per the World Bank report, over the next four decades, India's annual economic growth is expected to stand at about 8% therefore; it has the potential to be world's fastest growing major economy over the period to 2050. The Price Water Cooper has estimated that by 2050 India would lead all economies well above the

Western and Asian economies including US and China. Its report also highlighted some of the key factors behind India's high economic growth rate i.e. the young and rapidly growing working age population, strong engineering skills and rising level of education, and sustained growth of the consumer market due to rapidly growing middle-class population and their disposable income. This should provide ample opportunities to its economic partners, including those of ASEAN.

**Tourism.** In ASEAN, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore have developed considerable expertise and competitive advantage in tourism services. In recent years, Vietnam is also developing into an important tourist destination. The flow of ASEAN visitors to India is quite small. India on the other hand has only very recently realized the need to implement an integrated tourism industry which will induce not only substantially larger number of international visitors but also provide conducive atmosphere and value-for-money services to increase their expenditure per day.

**Manpower Flows.** ASEAN's rapid economic growth has led to manpower shortages at all skill levels, particularly in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. ASEAN countries may also consider further measures to attract professional and technical talent from India, and to better utilize the possibilities provided by the presence of the Indian Diaspora, the way United States has done. Continued nurturing of the relations along these lines by the two sides is essential to translate the emerging economic opportunities into reality.

## Bilateral Relations

India's relation with South East Asia should translate both at the level of the grouping as well as at the bilateral level. The highlights of bilateral relations are briefly covered.

**Myanmar-India.** Myanmar and India share a 1600 kilometre long border and is strategically located as a gateway to ASEAN from India's Northeast. There are emerging bilateral opportunities in infrastructure sector such as roads and ports; hydroelectric and hydrocarbon sectors, particularly in natural gas; and in technological cooperation in such areas as agriculture and natural resource monitoring. Currently, the main emphasis is on developing road and banking links. India is now Myanmar's largest export market. Its exports are mainly forest products, and agricultural commodities, such as pulses. Given Myanmar's isolation from the Western world, it can reap significant benefits from economic cooperation with India.

**Indonesia- India.** Presently, Indonesia is India's second largest export market in the ASEAN region. After achieving the bilateral trade target of \$10 billion in 2009, Indonesia and India are looking to double the value of trade between the two countries by 2013. India imports palm/vegetable oil, crude, petroleum and paper products, and spices whereas, major Indonesian

imports are textile yarn, chemicals, electric power machinery and parts, refined petroleum products, iron and steel goods, wheat, rice and sugar. India also has considerable shortages of cooking oil, while Indonesia is emerging as a major palm oil producer. Indonesia is heavily dependent on imported drugs and health care equipments. Indian pharmaceutical companies are internationally competitive in generic drugs. Another important area of economic cooperation between the two countries could be in the area of infrastructure development, particularly in railways, aviation etc. and in commercialization of space activities in which India is emerging as a competitor.

India and Indonesia can also consider cooperation in the area of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The Indian technology is cost effective, and cooperation could benefit both sides. Indonesia's public support at the highest levels for India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council has created a favourable atmosphere for deeper economic engagement between the two countries.

**Malaysia-India.** Malaysia is among the first set of countries with which India is sharing its space technology. The areas for cooperation are provision of Indian facilities for satellite launch by Malaysia on globally competitive terms. India can help with its large pool of manpower in healthcare and education sector which could be widened to other areas, such as management and information technology. Opportunities exist in generic and other drugs, including for the HIV-AIDS. Indian Ayurvedic medicines also have potential to be culturally more compatible and affordable to a wider population in Malaysia. Joint efforts in this area thus could be beneficial to both sides. Some Indian companies from the health and pharmaceutical sectors already have presence in Malaysia, but the two countries could consider strengthening it. Malaysia on its part is in a strong position to assist India in providing infrastructure expertise and investments; and in the energy sector. Malaysia possesses considerable strength in the plantations sector, particularly in research on rubber. India's need and low level of development in this sector therefore, could provide opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation. Malaysia aims to be an important centre for information technology. It has invested heavily in requisite infrastructure facilities, but lacks a critical mass of talent in the ICT sector. India is an internationally recognized source of such talent.

**Philippines-India.** Philippines has been traditionally indifferent towards its relationship with India. Bilateral trade is less than two percent of India's total trade with ASEAN which have reached \$50 billion. Potential areas of cooperation include construction, road and transport management, steel, machinery, information technology, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology. We can accelerate this bilateral relationship. A visit by a dignitary preceded by an exchange of senior officials would be helpful. The ASEAN-India Dialogue should certainly be taken advantage of as an opportunity to engage the Indian political and economic leadership.

**Singapore-India.** The emerging opportunities are largely in the services sector, particularly in ICT, logistics services, business and financial services, tourism, and health services. In the

tourism sector, opportunities are emerging rapidly for Singapore as Indian tourists have become the highest spenders among tourists with growing affluence among the Indian middle class. Singapore tourism authorities have also been actively involved in promoting select areas in India as a tourism destination for Singaporeans. Singapore has invested in projects to upgrade India's ports, airports and developing information technology parks. Both nations have worked to collaborate on aviation, aerospace engineering, space programmes, information technology, biotechnology and energy. There is greater scope in not only in the IT sector, but also in biotechnology, life sciences, and other areas.

**Thailand-India.** Thailand traditionally had weak institutional linkages with India. There are several areas where Thailand and India could cooperate for mutual gain. As Thailand aims to develop knowledge-based economic activities, it needs to augment professional and technical manpower, particularly in the IT sector. Thailand is experiencing rapid individual and population ageing as reflected in increased life expectancy, and increasing proportion of the population above 60 years of age. Its healthcare costs are expected to increase quite significantly due to population and individual ageing and due to sexually transmitted diseases viz. HIV-AIDS. Indian pharmaceutical industry could be an element in containing healthcare costs. This is because there is now an increased recognition that generic drugs are cheaper and more than commensurately effective, and in this area, Indian firms have a degree of international competitiveness. Thailand's expertise in the food-processing industry, particularly in deep-sea fishing and other marine related activities represent another area where we could cooperate.

**Vietnam-India.** The main challenge for Vietnam and India is to develop a substantial economic and commercial content to their traditionally close political relationship. The two countries are already cooperating in the energy sector, but there is scope for strengthening it. Cooperation in the civilian nuclear power sector for energy is also feasible and desirable. Mineral exploration and processing is another area which is being actively explored by the two sides. For both the countries, food security is an important pre-occupation. While in some commodities, such as rice, tea, and cashews, the two countries are in competition, there are several other areas, particularly those relating to agricultural research, and biotechnology where the scientists from the two countries could fruitfully cooperate. Facilitating trade and investments in agro-chemicals and fertilizers also merit serious consideration. The two countries could also cooperate in the area of pharmaceuticals and healthcare, particularly in the area of drugs for diseases like HIV-AIDS and Information and Communication Technology.

**Shared Interests and Common Challenges.** Apart from economic reasons, India and ASEAN share joint concerns in various areas viz, counter terrorism, anti piracy, counter narcotics, sea lanes protection. The security of the Strait of

Malacca which connects the South China Sea and Indian Ocean remains the primary concern.

Almost all ASEAN states have undergone violent conflicts/insurgencies. Some are still facing the menace. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have undergone civil wars. Philippines has been suffering a radical Islamic separatist movement. In South-east Asia, most insurgent and terrorist groups are based in Indonesia, southern Thailand and southern Philippines. Due to effective counter-terrorism operations, the threat in Indonesia has dramatically declined. India too has specific concerns about the decades old insurgency in the Indian North Eastern states which uses North Western Myanmar as a safe haven.

There is also convergence between India and ASEAN on non traditional security challenges particularly in the areas of climate change and disaster relief. Lastly India and ASEAN can find each other useful while facing the strategic challenge posed by the rise of China.

**Conclusion.** There are no contentious issues between the two sides as was the case during the Cold War period. India now has greater capacity and economic and technological momentum to sustain its growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is the second fastest growing economy after China and the third largest economy in terms of purchasing power. By 2035, India is projected to become the world's third largest economy after China and the US. There are emerging economic opportunities between India and ASEAN in merchandise trade, in services, and in investments and manpower flows. India and the ASEAN countries also have opportunities for cooperation and discussion in other such for a such as G-15 (Group of 15 developing countries which included India, Indonesia, and Malaysia); Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), which includes, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand as members; Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), which includes Cambodia, India, Laos, and Vietnam; and BIMSTEC (which includes India, Myanmar, and Thailand).

In addition, India has been especially active in forging bilateral

relations with individual ASEAN countries, particularly, Indonesia, Myanmar, Singapore and Vietnam. This is reflected in a recent series of visits by India's President, Prime Minister and External Affairs Minister, along with large business delegations, to these countries. The frequency of bilateral visits to India by the ASEAN leaders and their business delegations has also increased in recent months. India needs to vigorously pursue its "Look East" policy, and continue its efforts to engage each and every ASEAN member in a mutually beneficial manner. Culture and history can at best provide a basis but, it cannot be a substitute for substance. Following steps could help in giving boost to the relationship:-

- Upgrade and institutionalise regular bilateral dialogue with South East Asian Nations.
- Regular exchange of visits at the highest levels in consonance with emerging strategic partnership.
- Annual or more frequent Foreign Minister level dialogues on strategic, security, political and defence issues affecting the region and covering major international developments.
- Regular Defence and Security cooperation, including enhanced service-to-service links.
- Joint/coordinated approach on issues like keeping the Bay of Bengal free of illegal activities, keeping the sea-lanes secure and preventing activities by inimical elements/powers in this space.
- Institutionalized Government to Government and people to people regular formal and informal links encompassing all areas between India's Northeast and South eastern Asian states.
- An autonomous high level forum to be set up to promote, diversify and strengthen further cultural, religious, tourism, educational and HRD links.
- Connectivity with South East Asian States should be accorded priority along with revival of trans-border historical links. A small, though belated, beginning has been made but much more needs to be done.
- Institutionalize links at people to people level including legislators, academics, media persons, business leaders and links and tie-ups between institutions, Chambers of Commerce, Universities, decentralized administrative units etc. Greater private sector partnership in business, investments, trade, HRD & education etc is desirable.

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Views Expressed in the Paper are those of the panellists and do not represent the views of the CENJOWS.

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