

Chapter-2

India's Look East Policy: A Theoretical Overview

As India was opening its economy to the world market, it became aware of the growing trend towards regionalism and feared that it might be marginalized from the dynamics pushing the global economy. Being an outsider to the most important regional arrangements, India was increasingly concerned about the adverse impact of the growth of regionalism.¹ Since the 1980s indeed the number of regional trade agreements effected had increased dramatically. No fewer than thirty four regional agreements were notified to GATT (General Agreement on Tariff and Trade) Under Article XXIV, between 1990 and 1994. India was then afraid that this proliferation of regional trading arrangements would lead to protectionism and inward looking trade blocs. In the beginning of the 1990s, the world trading system seemed to be on the way to getting fragmented into three major regional blocs, with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the European Union and, possibly, Japan with East Asia.²

Western Europe embarked on a deepening and an enlarging of its integration process. The 'Common Market' came into force in 1993 and the ex-socialist economics of Eastern Europe seemed likely to join the European Union in the middle term. The United States also found a renewed interest in transcontinental regional arrangements.³ The North American Free Trade Agreement took shape in 1993, among the United States, Canada and Mexico. The long term ambition of the United States through NAFTA was to create a Pan-American free trade area. In other words, all of South America was potentially involved in this project. From New Delhi's point of view, the EC and NAFTA

are not in keeping with the non-discriminatory multilateral trading regime advocated by the World Trade Organization. India has been all the more worried about this trend towards regionalism in the West, as the European Countries and the United States have been its most important economic partners. The European Union accounts for 26 percent of India's imports and 28 percent of its exports. The United States is India's largest trade partner, as it absorbs 18 percent of its exports and provides 14 percent of its import.⁴ Therefore, India has been afraid to face a problem of market access in these regions of export interest. It has also worried that these regional groups might affect the prospects of attracting investment flows.

In keeping with its new enthusiasm for transcontinental regionalism, the United States also sponsored the creation of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation group (APEC).⁵ The forum was established in 1989 at a ministerial summit in Canberra, but gained momentum with the Seattle Summit of 1993, when the leaders of the member countries but forward a vision of a 'Community of Asia-Pacific economics'. At the summit in Bogor, Indonesia, in November 1994, the member countries adopted the goal to set a free trade area in the Asia-Pacific by 2010. The unique feature of APEC lied in its principle of 'concerted unilateral liberalization' which differs from the preferential trade liberation practiced by the UE and NAFTA. By the mid 1990, APEC was appearing the most rapidly expanding economic region of the world.⁶ It was the largest market in the world, accounting for nearly half of the world GDP. It was the epitome of Asia-Pacific prosperity and the incoming Asian Century.

New Delhi has sought an entry into APEC since its inception. But it has so far not been accepted as a member. India believes that membership of APEC is likely to boost

economic ties with this region. However, exclusion from APEC should not in theory after India's links with Asia-Pacific economics. Indeed, APEC is meant to uphold the principal open regionalism towards the non-members and for facilitating business and technical cooperation among member countries. Thus, India is being kept out of the flow of information, the networks of expertise and the databases concerning technology, trade and investment regime among APEC members.⁷

During the 1990s, India continued to find itself isolated from the mega groups structuring the global economy while in its own region; the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) could not succeed in creating major trade relations. SAARC was formally launched in 1985 with the aim of promoting economic cooperation between its seven members, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Republic of Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. But this regional organization did not make any significant progress due mainly to the Indo-Pak dispute and to domestic political turmoil throughout the region.⁸ In 1992, intra-regional trade only accounted for 3 percent of the global trade of SAARC members. A South Asian Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA) was proposed in 1993 to free trade in the region, through the grant of tariff concessions for products of export interest to the seven member countries of SAARC. In 1995, SAARC members decided to work collectively towards the establishment of a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). Thus, in October 1995, SAFTA countries agreed to introduce preferential tariffs on 224 items of common track. However, India cannot expect that SAARC will be a major influential pole in the global economy in the near future.⁹

In addition, trans-regional multilateral groups such as the Group of 77 (G-77), UNCTAD and the Non-aligned Movement seemed to have lost their influence. The regionalist trend of the 1990s brings together developed countries as well as developing countries in the same regional group so that the bargaining power of the Third World as a collective entity has been undermined. For India which used to be very involved in South-South cooperation, this development means that it is likely to be more and more isolated in international trade negotiations for the protection of developing countries interests. The fact is that regional groups have more leverage in the negotiating process than individual countries. In this regard, India has understood that if it is not part of any major regional group, it will be deprived of a strong bargaining capacity in negotiations on trade issues. India's ability to bargain efficiently in the WTO was especially important during the 1990s as the organization was mandated to start negotiations on contentious issues such as the social clause, labour standards and trade related environment measures. These issues have been of primary interest to India.¹⁰

Ramesh Behl and L. D. Mago, two researchers from the India Institute of Foreign Trade, sum up India's situations in relations to the evolution of the world trade system in the mid 1990s and they draw the general conclusion. The world trading system is in the process of splintering into trade blocs in spite of the successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations. No trading bloc in South Asia is likely to have enough economic clout to counteract this phenomenon of trading blocs causing a market entry problem to a country like India. This calls for a closer relationship with regional trading blocs on bilateral bases. Thus a closer relationship with ASEAN is a pre-requisite for India.¹¹ In sum, owing to this situation of exclusive from major trade groups, India

has been anxious not only to be a partner of ASEAN but also to associate itself more closely to the East Asian region.

The Look East Policy is one of the most important aspects of India's integration in the world economy. The integration into the East Asian region is regarded as the best springboard into the global economy as it is one of the most globalized and opens areas in the world. The ASEAN's economic, political and strategic importance in the Asia Pacific region and its potential to become a major trade and investment partner, have been particular motivating factor for India. This perspective is in keeping with Singapore which has proposed India to be its gateway to the Asia-Pacific and the world economy. It should also be underlined that India's strategy to integrate into the East Asian region is based on its unilateral economic liberalization and economic diplomacy and not on any preferential trade agreement. This is consonant the East Asian approach to regionalism.¹²

In order to have a substantive understanding of the content and purpose of the so called 'Look East Policy', there is a need to have retrospective look out the multiple geo-economics and geo-political factors operating in the late 1980s and early 90s of the 20th century at the global, regional and domestic levels. Foreign policy decision is determined by various factors prevailing at particular pounds. The factors that made India rethink and redefine its relations with South-East Asia and Asia-Pacific are based on the transformations in the global geo-political equations in the Post Cold War disintegration of Soviet Union has serious implication not only for India's political-economic conditions but also its foreign policy.¹³ The disintegration meant loss of a time tested friend and all who supported India at various issues, be it Kashmir, Goa or Indo-Pak wars, the United Nations and other investment and financial help for India's economic development

through centralized planning. Collapse and disintegration of Soviet Union meant loss of market for Indian goods. In the aftermath of the Cold War both India and Russia faced serious political economic crises. Radical transformations and reorientation in the foreign economic and political policies became inevitable in the Post Cold War Russia and India. The point of convergence that existed between India and Soviet Union during the Cold War period disappeared. India's policy of Non-alignment became redundant to Russia's geo-strategic interest due to the emergence of a Uni-polar world order. Suddenly the ties between Moscow and the Third World Countries ruptured. Almost overnight, the countries of the Third World became for Moscow distant foreign countries. As the Russian economy during this period became bankrupt, it began to look towards the West for her economic regeneration. Unlike erstwhile Soviet Union, the Successor State, Russia's foreign policy objective at this stage became west centric. The re-prioritization, readjustment and redefining of interests among Russia's ruling circle had produced all time low Indo-Russian relation in the early part of the Post Cold War period.¹⁴

Prior to the 1990s, development of close ties between India and ASEAN was greatly stalled due to various political reasons, but principally, because of India's alliance with the Soviet Union. The affirmation and support of India on the presence of the Soviet in Afghanistan as well as the recognition it gave to the Heng Samrine regime in Cambodia became a significant impediment in establishing ties. The end of the cold war marked major changes on the relationship of India ASEAN. In 1992, India ultimately became a sectoral-dialogue partner of ASEAN and a full dialogue partner by December 1995 which made India much closer to ASEAN member countries.¹⁵

Historically and Politically, India has played a significant role in the Indochina region. Unfortunately, the political investment made in that part of Southeast Asia during the 1950 to 1970s was not followed up with economic interaction in the subsequent decades. This had stymied the relationship to an extent, though the warmth in political equations with Vietnam Laos and Cambodia continues to this day.¹⁶

In the Post-Cold war scenario, some obstacles, which came into way of development of India and ASEAN relations, were removed. Besides, as result of disintegration of USSR both came closer to each other. These have been doubts in the minds of policy makers of Southeast Asian Countries about India's position due to the latter are policies towards Afghanistan and Cambodia. But in 1988, after the withdrawal of Soviet military forces from Afghanistan and in 1979 the return of the forces of Vietnam from Cambodia, the obstacles were removed from their way. As a result of disintegration of USSR, the policies adopted by both the region during cold war also came to an end and India initiated new approaches in foreign policy matters.¹⁷

Although India signed treaty of friendship and cooperation with Russia in 1992 but it was different from the original treaty, when it has signed with USSR in 1971. Developments during the Cambodian Crisis provided a major opportunity for ASEAN and its member states to observe India more closely and increase interaction with her at the official and political levels. India played a key role in resolving the Khmer crisis and worked closely with ASEAN and the west to negotiate the Paris Conference and treaty that resulted in an international agreement on Cambodia in 1991. This paved the way for a greater U.N. role in facilitating Cambodia's return to the international arena and its

subsequent experiments with democracy. India played a leading role in holding and monitoring the first ever democratic election in the Kingdom in 1993.¹⁸

Along with above mentioned changes, India also changed its foreign policy, orientation by learning towards East. In its 'Look East Policy', India took first step to improve relations with Asia-Pacific countries in general and with major emphasis on ASEAN countries in particular.

There were frequent interactions senior Indian officials and their South-East Asian counterparts. Their joint membership of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) enabled them to re-launch bilateral relations fairly quickly. In September 1992, at the NAM Summit in Jakarta, Narasimha Rao had a private meeting with Mahathir and Goh Chok Tong, the Prime Ministers of Malaysia and Singapore respectively, as well as with president Soharato of Indonesia¹⁹. Moreover, soon after being promoted to the post of Minister of finance in April 1991, Man Mohan Singh chose Singapore and Malaysia for his first visits abroad, a truly symbolic choice. As for Narasimha Rao, he personally visited most South-East Asian countries between 1993 and 1995. The Prime Minister visited Thailand in April 1993 and made concrete efforts to give an impetus to trade relations, along with his Thai counterpart. In fact, the two Prime Minister agreed on the need for high level political orientations for the intensification of bilateral commercial ties and, to this end, identified several sectors for future cooperation. In September 1994, Rao visited Singapore, a state that no other Indian Prime Minister had visited officially for twenty-six years, before going on to Vietnam. His Vietnam visit led to the establishment of working groups to accelerate the economic ties. In August 1995, Rao visited Malaysia, accompanied by a large business delegation. No less than five MoUs

were signed in the presence of the two Prime Minister, Concerning, both the protection of bilateral investments as well as cooperation in the highway construction and satellite communication sectors.²⁰

Both India and ASEAN became conscious of the potential in enhanced political, economic and security co-operation. With the reforms in place and the attractions of the East Asian miracle, New Delhi envisaged great possibilities in forging closer equations in her eastern neighbourhood as foreign minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao fashioned what has come to be called the 'Look East Policy'. His successor in the Ministry of External Affairs, Inder Kumar Gujral, found merit in this policy leading to a sharpening of focus on ASEAN.²¹

The two sides were willing and ready to jettison the historical baggage of the Cold War era and Look to a new and dynamic partnership. India was no longer a part of the Soviet bloc and ASEAN was not clinging on to the coat-tails of the U.S. It could see enormous potential in trade and investment ties with India. Now New Delhi was ready to embrace free market economics. There was a realization that decision making in India was largely political with even ties determined by political equations. They also supported India's claim for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.²² Through their actions, deeds, officials declaration and joint press statements, ASEAN countries supported India's Look East initiatives. Such a response had desired effects and strengthened the evolving relations between the two regions. A close scrutiny of India's Look East Policy reveals that it was not simply meant to improve relations with Southeast Asia but there were a number of dimensions too. As Naidu says, Look East Policy is a multi- facted and multi-pronged approach to establish strategic links with many

individuals' countries, evolve closer political links with ASEAN, and develop strong economic bonds with the region. Second, it is an attempt to carve a place for India in this larger Asia-Pacific. Thirds, the Look East Policy also means to work as a showcase for India's economic potential for investment and trade.²³ According to Grare and Mattoo, another interesting dimension of India's Look East Policy is exhibition of greater sensitivity towards a large number of smaller countries of Southeast Asia.²⁴

With regard to the first, India tried to reach out to its Southeast and East Asia neighbours in many ways. Through various exchanges of officials visits, including at the highest political levels, India tried to explain to its eastern neighbours that India was a modern, peace loving, practical and cooperative country. In bilateral discussions, India's attempt was to enhance political understanding, identify areas of mutual interests and initiate moves to harness these interests.²⁵ According to Naidu, the diplomatic strategy that was adopted appears two-folds. First, after having realized that ASEAN is the focal point around which it would have to rebuild its relationship, India's primary objective was to become a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN. Second, to target selected ASEAN member nations for closer bilateral relations.²⁶ Through intense diplomatic efforts, India was made a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1992 which got elevated to the status of Full Dialogue Partner during the 5th ASEAN Summit Meeting of 1995. India joined the ARF, followed by the first ASEAN– India Summit in 2002. At the third ASEAN – India Summit in Vientiane (Laos) 2004, both sides signed the landmark agreement, "the ASEAN – India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity". Indeed, that is considered an indispensable actor in Southeast Asia. ASEAN's efforts to expand its model of cooperation beyond Southeast Asia coincide with India's "Look East

Policy". The introduction and pursuit of this policy reflects India's ability to the post-cold war regional political economic dynamics in the Asia-Pacific. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of China and the rapid growth of ASEAN countries spurred India's to adjust its foreign policy, with priority given to expanding economic and political ties with all countries.²⁷

After a decade of its 'Look East Policy', India has made considerable political progress in engaging with ASEAN and its members countries. The Look East Policy has also facilitated dialogue from political and security perspectives between India and East Asian nation. India is taking part in the annual Summits with ASEAN and the EAS meetings and also bilaterally, is playing a key role under a system providing for regular annual dialogue both at Summit level and that of foreign ministers. On security matters, India is getting increasingly integrated with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to promote regional cooperation in matters like the maintenance of security of sea-lanes of communication. India's goal has been stated as setting up a polycentric security order, based on the need for a cooperative approach considering the East Asian diversity.²⁸

These countries supported India's stand on various issues in the United Nations. India's initiatives brought a change in their attitude towards certain important issues confronting the former. For example, Indonesia refused to interfere in the Kashmir issue and Singapore supported India's stand in this regard. Many of them willingly took part in Milan exercises hosted and conducted by India navy. They did not react or condemn the Pokhran-II nuclear test conducted by India in May 1998. On terrorism, they expressed their unity and solidarity with India as and when it faced such violence.²⁹ ASEAN leaders, having recognized the importance of India as development partner, have sought

greater engagement with India in recent years. Delivering the India-ASEAN Eminent Persons Lecture in New Delhi, the former Foreign Minister of Indonesia, All Alatas stated:

“Today, India has an important role to play in the political, economic and social development of ASEAN. There are of course, reciprocal benefits if India plays that role to the full extent, not the least of which is the profits of trade and returns on investments. Engagement with ASEAN can give substance to India's Look East Policy. A depending of dialogue relations between India and ASEAN will certainly have a positive impact on the environment for political and economic cooperation in the Asia Pacific and form such on eventuality, all nations in this region will benefit. That will be good for India and ASEAN, for the region and for a world caught up in rapid and fundamental.”³⁰

On bilateral level, Singapore has emerged by for the most important bilateral partner of India, and was instrumental in strongly support India's case for dialogue partnership, membership in the ARF, and India ASEAN plus one Summit Meeting more recently. . It may have seen a greater promise and potential in India's growing and liberalizing economy. As a result, India has close relations with Singapore in the whole region, since the adoption of its Look East Policy .For some in explain reasons, Indonesia's Suharto in particular appeared reluctant to enter India in South East Asia. Malaysia was quite upbeat to begin with but interest gradually, probably due to the tardy progress on the economic front. But their relations gathered momentum in the second phase of the Look East Policy. Besides, signing a strategic partnership agreement with

both, India also signed a comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with Malaysia during Prime Minister's Man Mohan Singh's visit to Malaysia in October 2010 and with Indonesia in January 2011.³¹

Within ASEAN, India has adopted a differentiated approach between the new ASEAN members namely Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam and the old ASEAN members. The new members joined ASEAN during the 90s and have been not only economically lagging behind the old ASEAN members, but also had a different strategic background and perspective. These countries can provide enough scope and opportunities for India to extend its influence. The special focus on these new ASEAN countries in India's Look East Policy also led to the creation of a separate administrative unit, the CMLV (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam) desk, in the Ministry of External Affairs to deal with them. Special programmes of assistance and cooperation in diverse fields are being initiated and executed in CMLV countries through this unit.³² Whereas, India had a close relationship with Vietnam since the late 1970s, it always treated Myanmar as a part of its immediate neighbourhood. Of all Southeast Asian nations, Myanmar has special place from India's strategic and security perspective as Myanmar is the land bridge between India and ASEAN. Incidentally, Myanmar was also administratively a part for some years of British Indian Empire and there existed close relations between the two countries from 1947 until 1964 when military took over power. While the main thrust of Look East Policy has been economic integration, energy security with the nations of Southeast Asia, in the case of Myanmar it is also strategic importance and security of Northeast India. Several measures have been undertaken through Look East Policy to uplift Northeast India such as, 'Asian Highway', 'Asian Railway Link', and

'Natural Gas Pipeline'. There are proposals underway to connect ports and aviation from Northeast to Southeast Asian Countries.³³

The Look East Policy has been implemented through a great number of high profile Indian delegations visiting the countries of East Asia. The most important of them have been usually led either by the Prime Minister himself, or by the Ministers of External Affairs, Finance or Commerce. The Primary emphasis of these trips to East Asia had been on economic cooperation. More precisely, one of the East Asia has been on economic cooperation. More precisely, one of the Prime objectives of the Indian Political leaders abroad has been to highlight the opportunities of cooperation in the priority sectors of development such as infrastructures of telecommunication, power and transport communication (Ports, railways, roads), where India needs, massive resources. In keeping with the new tenets of economic diplomacy, these diplomatic missions have taken long high powered business delegation. Furthermore, during trips abroad, Indian Political leaders have been eager to meet not only their political counterparts, but also to establish direct contacts with the captains of industries in the countries of their visit. for instance, when he went to Japan, Prime Minister Rao spent two day meeting the leaders of the five major economic organizations of Japan as well as the chairman of Japanese multinational corporations interested in India.³⁴

As for the countries of ASEAN, New Delhi sent a great number of high level delegations in the post-1991 period, in order to foster closer economic ties. Soon after he was assigned Finance Minister, in April 1991, Man Mohan Singh visits Singapore and Malaysia. The fact that he chose these two South East Asian countries for his first trip abroad gave an added symbolic importance to the visit. Beside it seems that the Indian

diplomacy selected Singapore as a regional centre to disseminate information about its economic reforms in the whole East Asian region. Thus, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tang was one of the first Head of State to be personally informed about India's liberalization process by the then External Minister, M. Solanki. A conference on India's reforms was jointly organized by the government of India and the Economic Development Board of Singapore as early as October 1991.³⁵

Rao went personally to most South-East Asian countries between 1993 and 1995. On the occasion of his visit to Thailand, in April 1993, he agreed with the Thai Prime Minister to give a political impetus to upgrade bilateral trade by at least 20 percent per year. P. V. Narasimha Rao also made highly publicized trips to Vietnam and Singapore in 1994. No Indian Prime Minister had been visited to these states for about 26 years.³⁶

On this occasion, Narasimha Rao had the privilege to be invited to give a lecture at the Institute of South-East Asian Studies (ISEAS). This was a unique opportunity to put forward his vision on the Indian Look East Policy to a high level South East Asian audience. In August 1995, P. V. Narasimha Rao paid an official visit to Malaysia and was accompanied by a large business team. On this occasion, he signed no fewer than five agreements to promote bilateral trade. No less than five MoUs were signed in the presence of the two Prime Ministers, concerning, both the protection of bilateral investments as well as cooperation in the highway construction and satellite communication sectors.³⁷

It has to be underlined that despite a new Union government coming into power in mid 1996, the Look East Policy kept momentum. For instance, External Minister of the

United Front government, I. K. Gujral went to Jakarta as early as July 1996, for one of his first trips outside the country.³⁸

The Look East Policy has also facilitated dialogue from political and security perspectives between India and East Asian nation. India is taking part in the annual Summits with ASEAN and the EAS meetings and also bilaterally, is playing a key role under a system providing for regular annual dialogue both at Summit level and that of foreign ministers. On security matters, India is getting increasingly integrated with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to promote regional cooperation in matters like the maintenance of security of sea-lanes of communication. India's goal has been stated as setting up a polycentric security order, based on the need for a cooperative approach considering the East Asian diversity.³⁹ The ASEAN held a collective summit with India (the ASEAN plus One Summit) for the first time in November 2002 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. It was considered "an acknowledgement of India's emergence as a key player in the Asia-Pacific Region."⁴⁰ Since then it has been held on an annual basis. The third India-ASEAN summit was held in Vietnam in 2004. The participants signed a partnership pact for peace, progress and shared prosperity containing a long-term vision for boosting trade, investment, tourism, culture, sports and people to people contacts. It also included Action Plan touching upon the entire gamut of political and security cooperation, including food, human resources, energy, finance science and technology, IT, Communication technology, health and agriculture. Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh on the eve of the summit said that,

“A long-term partnership agreement with ASEAN would provide a new dimension to our relations. He said that now India is on the horizon and the future lies in working together with our neighbours in the East, with whom we have profound civilization ties (2004).

At the same time, he spoke about linking East Asia with ASEAN for the community building. This was an idea which was meant to give an Asian touch to the existing regional arrangements. Whether it was proper to be revealed at ASEAN-India summit is an issue to be debated.⁴¹

India also offered to run daily flights to major Indian cities including New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai. The proposal to hold car Rally had also been made on the eve of India – ASEAN summit which was flagged off from Guwahati. This car Rally proved the geographic connectivity of India with Southeast Asia through a land route.⁴²

In December 2005, India attended the first East Asia Summit⁴³ (EAS, namely, ASEAN Plus Six) held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, along with the ASEAN countries and regional power including China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. With India being a founding member of the EAS, it represented India's deeper integration with Southeast and East Asia and confirmed India's role in constructing the future regional architecture. India believes that long term goal of the EAS should be the creation of prosperous community of nations build on shared values and interests.⁴⁴ In October 2004, Indian Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh put forward his vision of "an Asian Economic Community, which encompasses ASEAN, China, Japan, Korea and India". This community of nations would work for an integrated market, spanning the distance

from the Himalayas to the Pacific Ocean, linked by efficient road, rail, air and shipping services". It would "constitute an 'arc of advantage' across which there would be large scale movement of people, capital, ideas and creativity".⁴⁵

ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit 2012

To mark the 20th anniversary of the ASEAN-India dialogue partnership and the 10th anniversary of ASEAN-India Summit-level partnership, India hosted the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi on December 20-21, 2012. The theme of the summit was 'ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace and Shared Prosperity'.

The Summit has resulted in the adoption of the Vision Statement which will chart the future direction of ASEAN-India relations. The ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group (AIEPG) submitted their recommendations to the Leaders on future relations between ASEAN and India at the 10th ASEAN-India Summit in Phnom Penh.⁴⁶

India's Look East Policy and Multilateralism

The story of India's engagement with Southeast Asia is incomplete without a mention of its participation in a variety of regional multilateral frameworks since it has not been granted membership any major trade group, New Delhi has embarked on various regional and sub-regional arrangements which supplement its Look East Policy.

ASEAN Regional Forum (A.R.F.)

India's participation in the ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) in 1996 demonstrated its increasing engagement in the Asia-Pacific region, both in the political security and

economic spheres and underlines its commitment to objective of sustaining regional peace and stability.⁴⁷

Though India had become the member of ARF in 1996, but the institutionalization of ASEAN – India relations came with the first India – ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh on 5 November 2002 and was perceived as the success of India's Look East Policy. It was considered an acknowledgement of India's emergence as a key player in the Asia Pacific Region. Recently the 10th India-ASEAN Summit held in Phnom Penh on 19th November 2012. There a plan for action was prepared to implement the ASEAN – India partnership for Peace, Progress and shared prosperity, stability and development. The plan was made for political, economic and security cooperation, to enhance the cooperation in areas such as maritime security, counter-terrorism, environmental security and energy security.⁴⁸ There were initial reservations on India joining the new trans-regional "organization of the East Asia Summit (EAS), the initiative for which Malaysia may be traced back to 1991. In the perception of Malaysia and some other prospective members of this organization like China, India did not qualify to be an East Asian Country. This was contested by India and other ASEAN members like Singapore and Japan. Eventually, India along with Australia and New Zealand became its founding member when EAS was established in 2005.⁴⁹ Now India can legitimately claim that its Look East Policy is bearing fruits and it is being considered as a serious player in Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN also forged another regional organization called the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) in 2007, to cooperate, to begin with, in the areas of humanitarian and disaster relief. At its fourth meeting in Singapore in May 2010, the ADMM became ADMM+8, by including eight other members namely Japan, Korea, China, Australia,

New Zealand, India, Russia and the US.⁵⁰ The other trans-regional organization is Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) which was initiated in 1995 and included member states of ASEAN, EU, Japan, China and South Korea. Its goal was to work on major issues like trade and investment promotion, to promote educational networks, transportation, culture and technology. It is a great opportunity for India to being admitted in this organization in 2006, because it provides India a multilateral platform to engage EU in global trade. . India also became a member of the body dealing with security issues of ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)⁵¹. ARF had 24 members in which India has the leading role. It is mainly aimed at resolving political and security problems. The style of ARF is *musyawarah dan Mufakat* (Consultation and consensus). ARF has promoted Track-I and Track-II diplomacy to resolve regional security problems. Track-I is conducted at the institutional levels such as ARF or at the level of respective governments but Track-II aim at mobilising non-governmental organizations, business groups and strategic institutions in the region. In Track-II, preventive diplomacy is preferred so that the belligerent is restrained. The preventive diplomacy creates an environment in which the concern of each partners are expressed and the decisions are taken after wide consultations. The evolutionary rather revolutionary approach is preferred for conflict resolution.

The ARF facilitated greater strategic engagement for India with countries of the region, which was an ongoing process since 1990s.⁵² However when ARF was established (1993), it reflected regional concerns of security. Its Brunei meeting (1995) defined a framework for the future of ARF. It was to be evolved in three stages (a) the promotion of confidence building (including disaster relief and peace keeping activities),

(b) the development of preventive diplomacy and (c) the elaboration of approaches to conflict. In 1996, India got the membership of ARF and it has been participating in its activities.⁵³ The ASEAN wanted India, China and other actors in the Asia-Pacific to engage in regional security matter and build a consensus on broader issues of common concern. India's participation in ARF can be understood in the following areas:

- (a) Confidence Building
- (b) Maritime Cooperation and
- (c) Combating Terrorism

For confidence building, India regularly participates in ARF Senior Officers Meetings (ARF-SOM) and Inter-Sessional Support Group Meetings for Confidence Building Measures (ISG on CBMS) the Council for Security cooperation in Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) and other forums. The participants deliberate on transnational organized crime such as drug trafficking, terrorism or counter-terrorism, maritime piracy, and illegal movement of nuclear, chemical, biological and other materials.⁵⁴ There is greater understanding of India's security concerns in the ASEAN region and Pakistan has not succeeded in taking Kashmir dispute in the deliberations of ARF. The ASEAN support was tacit when India went for Pokharan II nuclear experimentation. Although Western reactions were vociferous, ASEAN did not pass any resolutions against India. The US, the UN, the EU, Australia and Japan indulged in criticism and the outbursts, but majority of ASEAN partners felt that if China can experiment its nuclear prowess, why not India?⁵⁵

Pokharan II was a clear indication of India's status as a nuclear weapon state and its potential to influence strategic developments in the region. The nuclear testing was not viewed as a threat, but as an asset. The countries of Southeast Asia could find India's contribution in a more positive perspective in fighting terror as against the same from the United States.⁵⁶ Equally important is the fact that India has been able to assure the regional states on its manifest neutrality and its desire to keep South Asian bilateral issues out of the ambit of interests in the region. Although India has refused to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), but a nuclear weapon state it was willing to respect the nuclear free status of Southeast Asia by converting this recognition into adjuce commitment. ASEAN states appreciate Indian gestures in strengthening their security profile. India's substantive roles in preventing sea piracy and terrorism have been appreciated.⁵⁷

B.I.M.S.T.E.C.

The institutional integration of India and Southeast Asia has not remained confined to ASEAN alone. Today India is eager to become involved in regional/sub-regional groupings with potential and promise from the very outset. India has participated in the establishment of new sub-regional grouping like the India –Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Scientific, Technological and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), and also participating as an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.⁵⁸

Amongst these groupings, India is most optimistic about the potential of BIMTEC as it aims to creating a sub regional pole of growth between South and South East Asia. In 1997, India along with some of the South and Southeast Asian neighbours, established a sub-regional grouping called Bay of Bengal Initiatives for Multi-sectoral Scientific, Technological and Economic cooperation to promote rapid economic cooperation on the areas of trade, investment, tourism, fisheries, agriculture, transportation links and human resource development. BIMST-EC adopts many characteristics of the East Asian sub-regional cooperative schemes⁵⁹. First, sub-regional Asian cooperative arrangements of ten try to enhance cooperation many countries at verifying stages of economic development. In BIMST-EC's case, as of 1996, the GDP per capita for Thailand was \$2810 compared to \$720 for Sri Lanka, \$370 for India, \$240 for Bangladesh and \$235 for Myanmar. But the fact is that sub-regional cooperation emphasizes the complementarities of the resources bases of the different partner. It helps to increase economies of scale in the production bases and facilitates the spillover of growth across national borders. The areas of cooperation under BIMSTEC expanded from original 6 to 13 which include cultural cooperation, Environment and Disaster Management, public health, people-to-people contact, poverty alleviation and counter-terrorism and transnational crimes. India's interest in BIMSTEC should be understood in the context of Look East Policy, the failure of SAARC, the Myanmar factor and the Northeast India⁶⁰

Today, the cooperation between India and the BIMSTEC countries has been escalating on an impressive level. India signed a Framework Agreement on FTA which aims to create a free trade area within BIMSTEC region by 2017 as a whole. Moreover, in sub-regional economic zones, the focus is not only on trade, but also infrastructure.

This is the case with BIMST-EC, as one of its priority goals is to build infrastructure linkages among member countries, especially transportation linkages. A number of overtures have been made by BIMSTEC countries to boost up the infrastructure in the region through the development of highway and rail links. At the inaugural ministerial meeting, on 6 June 1997, the representatives of the member states decided to consider the feasibility of setting up a regional airline to provide the required network for enhancing business and tourist links between the member countries. The recent launch of the India – Myanmar – Thailand Highway project is an important step in promoting overland connecting of India's Northeast Southeast. The proposal to build a rail line connecting New Delhi to Vietnam would further boost transport linkage amongst BIMSTEC countries.⁶¹ The member states have also confirmed that the group would be committed to the principle of open regionalism. BIMST-EC is thus consistent with India's other regional projects. Moreover, it supplements its partnership with ASEAN since it aims at intensifying interactions with two ASEAN members, Thailand and Myanmar. In this regard, BIMST-EC is a stepping stone to the Indian Look East Policy.⁶²

IOR-ARC

India's interaction with its eastern neighbours also take place in the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), established in 1997, to promote sustainable growth and balanced development of the region and member states; to focus on the areas of economic cooperation which provides maximum opportunities for development, shared interest and mutual benefits, and to promote liberalization, remove impediments and lower barriers to enhance flow of goods, services, investment and technology with the region.⁶³ IOR-ARC has been formed on the basis of the APEC

model. It is an ocean based regional cooperation project. Advocating the concept of open regionalism, as in APEC, the process is tripartite and involves governments as well as the business communities and academic circles. A major difference between the two mega groups is that IOR-ARC results from governmental initiatives whereas in APEC, economic cooperation has been primarily market driven. ⁶⁴

India and Indian Ocean are two inspirable entities. India's past, present and future are inextricably linked with the Indian Ocean. In the 12th meeting of council of ministers of IOR-ARC, held in Gurgaon on November 2012, six priority areas of cooperation were identified between India and IOR-ARC which include maritime security and piracy, disaster risk reduction, trade and investment facilitation, fisheries management, academic and S&T cooperation, and tourism and cultural exchanges. ⁶⁵ India's acceptance as an 'observer' in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization⁶⁶ (SCO) in July 2005, is another crowning glory in India's foreign policy towards its eastern neighbours and therefore, India has expressed the desire to be involved in the organization much more than it is today. Joining the SCO as a full member will enable India to be a part of one of the world's most power full regional groups and increase the level of multilateral economic cooperation and the flow of trade and energy resources. It will also align India's national security interest with that of regional countries especially of Russia and China. ⁶⁷

M.G.C.

Besides, these, India's interaction with its eastern neighbours also take place in the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, established in 2000, by India and the Mekong basin countries of Southeast Asia namely, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Kampuchea and Vietnam

to increase cooperation in tourism, culture and education, transportation and communication. The initiative was designed to redefine regions in the new global economy while keeping their motive and character intact. This is India's major cooperative venture in its Southeast Asian neighbourhood which offers immense scope to create linkage with the Mekong countries by connecting them to the Indian Northeast.⁶⁸

The Real benefit of the organization might not be its content but the counterbalance it can provide to the Southeast Asian states against the increasing influence of China in the region. India and the other member countries of MGC agreed upon to strengthen cooperation in the development of IT, infrastructure and networks and promote cooperation in air services and linkage in the region. In the infrastructure area, the East – West Corridor project and the Trans – Asian highway are some of the pioneering mare ever undertaken by India and the other member countries of MGC to promote transport facilities.⁶⁹ When completed the Asian highway project is expected to link up Singapore with New Delhi in South Asia via KualaLumpur, Ho chi Minh City, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vietnam, Chiang Mai, Yangon, Mandalay, Kalemyo, Tamu, Dhaka and Calcutta. India has already taken the first step in this direction and is involved in building the road linking Tamu (Manipur) to Kalemyo, a key communication junction in the centre of Myanmar. The project has also initiated certain innovative measures to improve air connectivity and for India it is providing ample opportunities to promote the linkage.⁷⁰

To enhance the areas of cooperation, in the 6th MGC meeting held in New Delhi in September 2012, the External Affairs Minister of India announced that, "the MGC has important relevance to the growth and shared prosperity in Asia. We have revitalized the forum by expanding our partnership to new areas of collaboration. In addition to the

existing four areas of collaboration under the MGC, namely culture, tourism, human resources development and education and transport and communication, we have today identified new areas of cooperation. These include health research, relevant to the region and sharing of expertise and pandemic management. We are confident that this new direction and energy infused into the forum today will help realize the great promise within the MGC.⁷¹ Thus, MGC is an extension of India's Look East Policy and also a reminder of its contact cultural and historical interaction with the mainland South East Asian countries. India is quite optimistic about the prospects of MGC project and is convinced about the efficacy of the underlying initiatives in harvesting favorable social and economic gains.

India's Look East Policy in Its Second Phase

India's Look East Policy has evolved in phases and directions gradually. One can clearly discern a greater engagement with ASEAN during the initial years with an emphasis on economic ties and institutional partnership. After almost a decade, the policy assumed a more pronounced strategic role and expanded to the countries other than ASEAN members like Australia, Japan and Korea. In 1998, the then Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee intended to accelerate India's Look East Policy. The concept of "extended neighborhood" was popularized by Indian leaders such as I.K. Gujral and Jaswant Sinha. After almost a decade, the policy assumed a more pronounced strategic flavor and expanded to the countries other than ASEAN member like Australia, Japan and South Korea. India's then Foreign Minister Jaswant Sinha heralded the second phase of the Look East Policy in 2003, by saying:

*"The first phase of India's Look East Policy was ASEAN-centered and focused primarily on trade and investment linkages. The new phase of this policy is characterized by an expanded definition of 'East' extending from Australia to East Asia, with ASEAN at its aim. The new phase also marks a shift from trade to wider economic and security issues including joint efforts to protect the sea lanes and coordinate counter-terrorism activities. On the economic side, phase II is also characterized by arrangement for FTA and establishing institutional economic linkage between the countries of the region and India."*⁷²

India is looking to develop association with countries beyond its immediate neighborhood, perceiving countries in the East and Northeast Asia as it's for eastern neighbors and the ASEAN countries as its near eastern neighbors like China, Japan, South Korea, Australia etc. A lot of reasons have been advanced as having contributed to the development and evolution of the second phase of India's Look East Policy. First, the Indian policy makers felt the need to pay more attention to the dynamic Asia-Pacific region as this region presented a lot of potential to the development and advancement of country's economic and strategic intents.⁷³ The other, according to C. Raja Mohan, is the movement away from exclusive focus on economic issues in phase one to a broader agenda in phase two that involves security cooperation, including joint operations to protect sea lanes and pooling resources in the war against terrorism. The another feature of the second phase of Look East Policy is that now India is trying to establish air and road links to East and Southeast Asia. As parts of its road diplomacy, India is now actively building transports corridors to the region.⁷⁴ These include the trilateral highway

project involving Myanmar and Thailand and the proposed rail link between New Delhi and Hanoi. Besides these, the second phase of India's Look East Policy has allowed India to break the artificial political barriers between the subcontinent and Southeast Asia. India has also developed close bilateral understanding and cooperation with Japan, South Korea and China. In the past few years, the relations between India and China developed and diversified in many areas at many levels. In spite of mistrust in their relationship, India – China's relations has been steadily expanding and maturing in recent years. These relations manifested in the regular high level political exchanges, burgeoning trade ties, nascent strategic dialogue, cooperation's in regional and international issues of common concern, etc. The visit of President Pratibha Patil's in May 2010 provided an opportunity for India and China to upgrade and deepen their engagement and help bilateral ties.⁷⁵ Bilateral relations between India and South Korea has been usually characterized by friendship, cooperation and understanding. As members of Non-Aligned Movement, there is commonality of views between the two nations on many international issues, for instance, disarmament, South- South cooperation. Today, both nations are key members of Asian economy.⁷⁶ The entering of the comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with South Korea which took effect from January 2010 and inviting the President Lee Myung Bak as Chief Guest for the Republic Day function in 2010 is note worthy in this regard. With Japan also, India had high level visits of Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Hatoyama in 2005, 2007 and 2009 respectively. India has some strategic partnership agreements, economic interaction, defence policy dialogue and have conducted joint naval exercise. India and Japan established a strategic and global partnership in Dec 2006 during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's official visit to Japan

and since then the bilateral relations are moving fast on various areas of cooperation including in the defence sectors. The first ever two plus two Dialogue at the senior defence and foreign affairs official level was held between the two countries on 6 July 2010.⁷⁷

Today, US have been regarded as an important background variable in the history of India-ASEAN relations. In the order to evaluate the role of the US in India-ASEAN relations, it is important to note that all three actors shared a number of common interests.⁷⁸ All of them perceived communism as a major threat for the domestic and the international order even if the governments had to cope with communist movements on a different level. Moreover, India and the US shared democratic values and enjoyed the benefits of free elections and freedom of expression. India and South East Asia were connected by many cultural and religious ties. The major religions of South East Asia, like Hinduism and Buddhism, originated from South Asia like Islam. Additionally, there were sizeable Indian communities in various parts of the region. If there were so many common interests in different fields, why wasn't there greater cooperation among these three actors? But the Indo-US rapprochement that became obvious with President Clinton's visit to India in March 2000 and with the visit of Prime Minister Vajpayee to the US in September of the same year can also be regarded in the overall context of a strategic realignment that can be observed in many parts of Asia. The multipolar world seems to benefit India in a much better way than the bipolar world system. Back in 1993 Munro has called India the loser of the Cold War. Ten years later there are numerous signs that India seems to be one of the winners of the international changes. The Indo-US rapprochement seems to be directed against China with democracy as the common

foundation.⁷⁹ In order to explore the complexity and repercussions of this trilateral connection, it is useful, first, to replace the triangle by three bilateral pairs (India-US, India-ASEAN, ASEAN-US) with India-ASEAN ties as the dependent variable. They will be analyzed at three different levels focusing on three different issues in order to throw some light on the role of the US in both regions. On the international level, employing competing concepts of the international order explained why India and the US remained 'estranged democracies' during the cold war. Secondly, on the regional level, the different approaches towards security pursued by India and ASEAN countries will be examined, finally, the issue of development and regional cooperation in India and ASEAN.⁸⁰ First, drastic improvement of Indo-US ties substantially altered India's relations with the countries of Southeast Asia in March 2000, the US President Bill Clinton visited India and this visit resulted in a marked realignment of New Delhi's geostrategic and foreign economic ties. After decades of neglect the improvement in Indo-US relations created a major spillover effect on New Delhi's relations with ASEAN. The emergence of the Bush administration, its decision to lift the nuclear sanctions against Pokhran-II nuclear bomb blast in 1998 and the unfortunate event on 11 September 2001, provided the opportunity to realise the promise of a "natural alliance" between New Delhi and Washington. This new equation with the U.S., also paved the way for building better and more extensive security and political links with the American affairs in the ASEAN Japan, South Korea and Australia.⁸¹ President Obama visited India at the beginning of November 2010, a move that was closely watched by the Chinese leadership. Indeed, Obama's trip could be interpreted as part of the growing coordination between the United States and India of Asian affairs. It was reported that Obama encouraged India not just to "Look east" but

also to "engage east".⁸² Furthermore, the United States is supporting India's bid to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Washington also continues to assist India in its civilian nuclear energy programme. In spite of this, the current Indian government wishes to retain its independent strategic identity and limit the potential costs of being identified too closely with the United States in Southeast Asia, as Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh stated in June 2008 that there was a need to develop closer relations with the United States but without sacrificing India's Independent foreign policy.⁸³

The United States, during President Barack Obama's second term, is committed to rebalancing towards Asia, with India playing a pivotal role, U.S national security adviser Thomas Donilon recently reaffirmed U.S. support for India's efforts in this regard adding: "U.S. and Indian interests powerfully converge in the Asia-Pacific, where India has much to gain."

In February 2013, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Indian Council for Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) brought together key Indian and U.S. decision makers and thinkers from the region for a conference in New Delhi entitled "Emerging Asia." In a Track 1.5 dialogue conducted under Chatham House rules, participants concluded that overall Indian and U.S. security policies converge, and more specifically that India's Look East approach is an area of long-term convergence between the countries.⁸⁴ The ten-member Association of Southeast Asians nations (ASEAN) views India as an indispensable security partner as well, because ASEAN's difficulties will also be India's. As the United States continues its "rebalance" toward Asia, it must demonstrate that the U.S.

commitment is not only to security but to be broad and sustained commitment to the Indo-Pacific, complete with a long-term economic engagement strategy. India and ASEAN want the United States engaged fully in the Indo-Pacific region.⁸⁵

Thus, India has achieved considerable progress in political relations with ASEAN. Both are trying to make better their relations through regular people-to-people contacts and exchange, occasional visits by top political leadership, and official state-to-state contacts etc. The non state actors are playing vital role. Cooperation between civil society organizations has began, though it is important to designate specific areas of interaction, say, education, culture, religion, art, tourism and several others. But, one cannot ignore the economic dimensions on India's Look East policy. The next chapter will focus on the growing political relations between India and ASEAN.

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