CHAPTER IV

RESPONSE OF THE SELECT STATES

With the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, and on the onset of globalization, nations began to realize that the development and progress can be achieved only by securing international trade and attract foreign investments. Free market rules and mass capitalization began dominating the international political scene. The 1990s witnessed rapid economic development in Asian countries, especially in Southeast Asia. India also emerged as an economic and political force, keen to intertwine its economic policy with Southeast Asia in order to grab the opportunity offered by untapped economic market of the region.

Evolved out of the newly emerging relationships at the end of Cold War, the Look East policy was not an unexpected development but an imperative for India. As the bipolarity set out and globalization set in, the world witnessed new emerging relationships among the nations which were less strategic and more economic. To meet the growing aspirations of the market forces, the state as a sovereign actor receded in its role and market forces began dominating the state policies. Economic regionalism, which was more pertinent to Europe after the Second World War, spread its pangs in other areas of Asia and Africa. As a result many regional economic alliances were forged in different parts of the world.

India undoubtedly is a regional power and certainly an emerging global power. It has an active foreign policy with a vision originated from its geographical settings and domestic moorings. From the policy of non-alignment during the Cold War, India was compelled to shift its policy in order to meet the growing demands of its market. Under the circumstances India had to expand its economic relations with the countries of Southeast Asia – especially the select ones. The initiatives taken by India under the Look East policy have provided it an opportunity to broaden its political and economic links with these countries. Look East policy was not sought to be merely diplomatic response between the governments prevalent in international relations during the 1970s and 80s; rather a relationship touching each other at every level and spot. In this chapter it is intended to examine the response of these countries to India’s Look East policy.
Despite the fact that India and the countries of Southeast Asia did not have close relationship throughout the Cold War, there have been certain issues of global concern where India was supported by these countries. However, this support gained momentum after 1990s which may be taken as a response to India’s efforts to develop close relations with them through its Look East policy. They supported India’s viewpoint on various resolutions together in the United Nations. Especially on ‘General and Complete Disarmament’, ‘Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space’, ‘Promotion and protection of human rights’. Southeast Asian countries supported India on the resolution on ‘Oceans and the Law of the Sea’ and ‘Protection of Global Climate’ passed in the 62nd session of the General assembly in December 2007. At the same Session of the General Assembly, Indonesia, on behalf of other Southeast Asian countries introduced a draft resolution entitled “Treaty on the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone”, also called the Bangkok Treaty. Countries of the Southeast Asia appreciated India’s vote and support in passing the resolution. Even on many issues of the international concern, they took a common stand. For example, during the 58th session of the General Assembly in June 2004, India and the select countries of Southeast Asia voted in favour of “Peace Mission of the United Nations in the Middle East.” To curb terrorism, these countries supported General Assembly resolutions to eliminate international terrorism. Such instances show visible shift in relationship between India and the countries of Southeast Asia.

**Shifting Response on Major Issues Confronting India**

As India initiated its Policy in early 1990s, the countries of the region also changed their attitude towards certain important issues concerning India. Long standing dispute between India with Pakistan on the state of Jammu and Kashmir needs a special mention here. During the Indo-Pak war in 1971, not only Indonesia sided with Pakistan but Indian Embassy in Jakarta was put on fire by the angry mobs supporting Pakistan. In 2005, the same country’s President Susilo Bambang Yodhoyono refused to interfere in the Kashmir issue. Singapore has also supported India’s stand on the Kashmir issue. Malaysia, an important Muslim majority country, has also chosen to be neutral on this issue. When India expanded its navy in 1970s and 1980s, there was strong reaction against such moves from the countries of Southeast Asia. They expressed apprehension on India’s intentions. During 1990s and later these countries became convinced and positively responded to India’s security
needs. When India established its naval outposts and Joint Command in 2002 there was hardly any adverse reaction from these countries. Rather, many of them willingly took part in the MILAN exercises hosted and conducted by Indian Navy in Andaman Sea. When India conducted Nuclear Tests (Pokhran II) in May 1998, there was a world wide reaction but ASEAN made a mild mention of the tests at its Manila Summit. No country of Southeast Asia condemned the Test. Some of the countries were rather happy, though secretly, on the tests. They welcomed the tests as a counterweight to China.

ASEAN considers terrorism as a global threat and has expressed seriousness to eliminate it. At times it has shown concern about Pakistan sponsored terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore openly condemned the acts of terrorists in India whenever they took place. When terrorists attacked Indian Parliament in December 13 December 2001, Singapore sent its condolences and these countries expressed unity and solidarity with India in the war against terrorism. When Bomb blasts took place in trains in Mumbai in 11 July 2006, or blasts took place on the Samjhauta Express they were condemned by the countries of Southeast Asia.

Under the Look East policy, India has taken some other initiatives like BIMSTEC and Mekong Ganga which have received positive response from the countries of the Southeast Asia.

**Response Through ASEAN**

Association of Southeast Asian Nations was established by the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand in 1967 to accelerate economic growth, social progress, cultural development and to promote peace and security in Southeast Asia. To achieve cooperative peace and shared prosperity, ASEAN promotes economic cooperation, trade and commerce among the member countries and between ASEAN members and the rest of the world. The most significant response of the Southeast Asian countries to the Look East policy has come through ASEAN. After the launch of the Policy in early 1990s these countries became convinced that cooperation with India will be mutually beneficial. At its Fourth Summit held in Singapore in January 1992, the ASEAN heads of governments agreed to establish Sectoral Dialogue with India on trade, investment, tourism and science and technology. This new partnership was formalized at the meeting of
ASEAN and Indian Senior Officials held in New Delhi on 16-17 March 1993. Under the agreed terms, the ASEAN-India Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee (AIJSCC) was set up to coordinate the promotion of these relations. An ASEAN-New Delhi Committee consisting of the Heads of Diplomatic Missions of ASEAN Member Countries in New Delhi was also set up. Secretary-General of ASEAN, Ong Keng Yong emphasized the importance of the development of the ASEAN-India dialogue partnership and expressed the commitment of ASEAN to strengthen cooperation through this relationship in the agreed sectors.

As a result, trade between the two sides increased, joint workshops in the field of science and technology were conducted, delegations were exchanged to promote tourism. In the field of trade and investment an ASEAN-India Round Table on trade and investment cooperation was held in Singapore in September 1995. Potential areas for joint action were identified which include manufacturing, telecommunications, construction, infrastructure projects, energy, highways, petrochemicals, setting of technology parks, and high-tech industries. The ASEAN-India Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee (constituted to deliberate on the issue of making India as a Sectoral Dialogue Partner) proposed the framework to establish of an ASEAN-India Business Council (AIBC). It also delineated the possible areas of cooperation and joint collaborations between the two sides. Efforts were made to expand trade between ASEAN and India, and set up joint ventures in the designated areas.

At the fifth ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in December 1995 India was elevated to the status of Full Dialogue Partner (FDP). This partnership with ASEAN enabled India to further expand its economic relationship with the member countries. Singapore was appointed as the Country Coordinator for ASEAN's Dialogue with India until 1999. At the operational level, ASEAN-India cooperation made substantial progress in tourism, science and technology, and trade and investment. In addition to the earlier agreed areas of cooperation, infrastructure development and HRD were added as potential areas of cooperation. Out of deliberations in the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference between Foreign Ministers of ASEAN and its full-dialogue partners, ARF was set up in 1994 as a regional security dialogue platform and India became a member of the ARF in 1996. Admission to the ARF underlines the acceptance of India's role and position in the Asia-Pacific region. These decisions were a conscious acknowledgement of India’s Look East policy.

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As India’s involvement in the region took a definite shape, the leaders of ASEAN at its 7th Summit in 2001 (Brunei, Darussalam) decided to upgrade its relations with India to the Summit level. The decision was in recognition of the sincere and sustained efforts by India to expand and deepen cooperation with ASEAN, as well as the individual countries. First ASEAN-India Summit was held at Cambodia in 2002 and it was agreed to enhance cooperation with India at various regional and international fora. It was resolved to intensify cooperation in the ARF and combat terrorism to achieve regional peace, security and stability. Recognizing importance to enhance their close economic cooperation, ASEAN and India signed a free trade agreement during the Second ASEAN-India Summit held at Bali in October 2003. During the third Summit held in Vientiane in November 2004, the ASEAN leaders appreciated India for its support and unilateral concessions to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV countries) and its support in implementation of the projects under the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI).

During the 6th Summit held in Singapore, ASEAN leaders expressed solidarity with India’s proposal to establish an ASEAN-India Network on Climate Change. They welcomed India’s offer to set up an "ASEAN-India Green Fund", with an initial contribution of US$ 5 million and a contribution of US$ 2.5 million for ASEAN-India Science & Technology Development Fund. The ASEAN now recognized that India's engagement with their region was a pillar of India's Look East policy.

The ASEAN-India Joint Cooperation Committee (established in 1993) became the key institutional mechanism to provide substantive content and implement programmes of cooperation. It became the nodal agency to actualize cooperation in trade and investment, science and technology, tourism, infrastructure, human resource development and people-to people interaction. Working Groups were also established on Trade and Investment, Science and Technology, Development Cooperation, Tourism, Transport and Infrastructure, Telecommunications, Pharmaceuticals, Health and Energy were constituted. Senior officials of both sides periodically met to monitor the working of these groups. On his visit to India in January 2001, ASEAN Secretary-General held discussions to explore ways to boost trade and economic cooperation between ASEAN and India. Such positive responses were not only due to India’s Look East policy but their desire to utilize India’s trained technical manpower to establish medium and small scale industries.
Another important reason of their growing inclination towards India was due to the financial crisis they faced in the 1990s. The countries of European Union became scared of further investments in the Region. ASEAN countries looked at India as an alternative for a long standing economic partnership. Equitable exchange rates between the ASEAN and India also made them think that investment here was more lucrative as compared to the European countries. Economic reforms in India encouraged them to invest here. Growing economic interests of the US, China and Japan in the region, also compelled the countries of Southeast Asia to perceive India as an alternative option for economic cooperation.

The Look East policy being comprehensive in nature touches every aspect of mutual concern including the growing world wide terrorism. India has repeatedly been hit by the terrorist activities and the same has happened to the countries like Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. The Jemmah Islamiyah and Al Qaida have been active in Southeast Asia. After the 9/11 Indonesia alone has faced many terrorist attacks including the two major terrorist attacks in Bali and Jakarta in 2002. India’s resolve to stamp out terrorism has figured in various MoUs, joint statements of the leaders and in many formal and informal understandings. India, with its superior technology and trained armed forces is in a position to fight against this menace. Realizing that, the countries of Southeast Asia have positively responded to India’s call to fight against terrorism. This common concern has made them look towards India for support to meet this challenge and depend on it to maintain peace and stability in the region. The evolving situation in both the regions is much less divergent than during the Cold War and it is mutually beneficial for both. India and ASEAN therefore can cooperate to stamp out drug and human trafficking, sea piracy, terrorism, arms smuggling, money laundering, economic crimes and cyber crimes. Other areas of regional cooperation in which these countries have responded include the Indian Ocean Rim-Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC). Thailand’s ‘Look West’ policy and proposal of a Bay of Bengal Community is another example of looking towards India as an anchor for the regional development.

The response at the ASEAN level has so far been encouraging. Since the launch of the Policy, relationship at every level and in every department has grown and developed. However it is important to see if this response has percolated to the
individual level or not. The country-wise response of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Myanmar is discussed as follow.

**Indonesia**

From warm ideological relationship at the time of independence to a cool indifference during the Cold War and again warming up, the relations between India and Indonesia have seen many ebbs and flows. India and Indonesia have worked together in the United Nations and World Trade Organization. Both the countries share common perception and voted together in UN in favour of resolution on peaceful uses of outer space, prevention of an arms race in outer space, complete disarmament, the Geneva protocol of 1925, question of self-determination demanded by the people of Palestine, promotion and protection of human rights, promotion of democratic international order, fight against the rising threat of terrorism, oceans and the law of the sea, concern about the violation of human rights in Iraq, protection of global climate and total elimination of racism.\(^{35}\)

In the beginning of 1990s, Indonesia supported Singapore’s proposal to make India a Sectoral Dialogue partner of the ASEAN. Subsequently, Indonesia positively responded and played an important role in making India a Full Dialogue Partner in 1995, member of ASEAN Regional Forum in 1996 and the East Asian Summit membership in 2005.\(^{36}\) The turn in the relationship was summarized by the President of Indonesia. He said “there was a time when we were so close. We have to restore the relationship. India could assist us in overcoming our economic difficulties.” He also emphasized the need to work together “as part of efforts to strengthen cooperation among Asian countries.”\(^{37}\)

Since 1990s trade between the two countries has grown substantially. The goodwill visits between the leaders of the two countries has increased. Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid, visited India in February, 2000 along with Ministers of Mines, Industry, Trade and Technology.\(^{38}\) Justice and Human Rights Minister, Yusril Ihza, visited in September 2000 and the Chief of the Indonesian Navy visited in September, 2000. In 2002, Megawati Soekarnoputri, the President of Indonesia, visited India along with, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Trade & Industry, Research & Technology, and State Minister for Communication & Information and a large business delegation. Apart from the political relationship, which according to her was satisfactory at the bilateral, regional, and international levels, she felt the need to
develop cooperation in trade, investment, health, and human resource development. In her speech she said:39

“The purpose of my visit is also to further enhance the bilateral relation between the peoples and governments of both countries. In my view, we still feel the need to improve our relation and I believe that we can do it. In trade, up to the end of the year 2000, its total value reached only US $1.5 billion. The figure is actually still very small. In view of the existing potentials of our economy…

In preparation for my visit, I have sent the Minister of Trade and Industry together with other Indonesian senior officials to conduct various talks with their Indian counterparts. The preparatory talks aimed at paving the way for the implementation of the cooperation, particularly within the framework of railway transport construction and in other areas such as pharmacy, agriculture and Information technology. I plan to have further discussion on those issues with Prime Minister Vajpayee this afternoon…. In addition to the afore-mentioned areas of cooperation, Indonesia is prepared to provide various supplies, among others: agricultural products such as palm oil, wood products, fisheries, a number of industrial products and general mining products like oil and gas. I understand that India also has considerable capability to support the development in Indonesia in the areas of education and health system, heavy machinery and agricultural hardware as well as other high-tech industries….

To that end, I once again invite Indian businessmen to come to Indonesia. I believe this is the best way for both of us to work together at this stage. I invite you to see yourselves the current situation in Indonesia and to make direct contact with your Indonesian partners, relevant government officials or even with my Ministers on business opportunities in Indonesia.”

Throughout the early years of the present century, Indonesia felt the need to that cooperation with India at different levels and sectors. Many MoUs were signed and agreements made during this time which can be taken as a positive response to the Look East policy. In 2004, Indonesia signed a MoU on Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism.40 In 2005, there was exchange of many Ministerial visits signifying the mutual desire of both countries to expand cooperation.41

The Look East policy received appreciation at the highest level in Indonesia. Its President, during his visit to New Delhi in November 2005, expressed appreciation for India’s Look East policy and the growing partnership between ASEAN and India,
which had been further strengthened by the adoption of the “India-ASEAN Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity” and its Plan of Action. The growing partnership between the two countries was considered as based on common interest in peace and prosperity for the entire South and Southeast Asia. In the joint statement on the occasion, President welcomed India’s offer of cooperation with the Department of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia in the procurement of defence supplies, defence technologies, joint production and joint projects. He agreed to hold an annual India-Indonesia Strategic Dialogue at the senior officials’ level from 2006. He stressed on evolving a New Strategic Partnership through closer diplomatic coordination, stronger defense relations, enhanced economic relations greater technological cooperation, as well as intensified cultural, educational linkages and people-to-people contacts.  

Recognizing that terrorism is a serious threat to international peace and security, President of Indonesia condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations as criminal and unjustifiable, irrespective of their motives. He emphasized on the need to develop cooperation to Combat International Terrorism and to coordinate measures to combat terrorism in a comprehensive and sustained manner. He also condemned the multiple bombings that had killed many innocent people in New Delhi on 29 October 2005. According to him a closer economic integration between India and Indonesia had the potential to transform Asia region into an “Arc of Advantage and Prosperity”. He looked forward to develop cooperation between National Institute of Aeronautics and Space of Indonesia (LAPAN) and the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and also appreciated India’s ITEC Programme.

During 2006, many Parliamentary delegations from Indonesia visited India which helped to strengthen the relations between the two countries. In 2007, the Governor of Aceh province of Indonesia visited India and the Minister of Social Affairs, Bachtiar Chamsyah, participated in the 2nd Asian Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Risk Reduction held in New Delhi in November 2007. Minister of Health, Dr. Siti Fadilah Supari participated in the Ministerial Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza held in New Delhi on 4-5 December 2007.

Apart from the increased high level visits, Indonesia is now supporting India for a permanent seat in the expanded UN Security Council and that the United Nations must see the entry of Asia in the Security Council India is a large country and
must be allowed permanent membership. Indonesia also supported India’s peace initiative for resolving the Kashmir problem. During Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee’s to Indonesia in 2001, the President of Indonesia supported India’s stand on Kashmir and said that Kashmir issue could be peacefully resolved under the existing agreements between the two countries.

It can thus be seen that after the launch of Look East policy there is increasingly visible warmth between the two countries. Not that India alone has initiated the policy to bring Indonesia close, rather the policy has got a favourable response. Growing cooperation between the two countries at regional and international level, growth of trade and investment and considerable increase in the visits by Indonesian political, military and civil establishment only prove that the Look East policy has received favourable response in Indonesia.

Malaysia

There has been a lack of enthusiasm in Malaysia-India relations since their independence in the 1940s. They had cordial relations all these years but differing perceptions on various issues of regional and international concern kept them away from each other. However, both the countries have voted together in the United Nations on crucial issues such as peaceful uses of outer space, prevention of an arms race in outer space, complete disarmament and the Geneva Protocol of 1925. Malaysia has supported Indian position regarding the right of self-determination to Palestine people and promotion and protection of human rights. Both have expressed a common understanding about the rising threat of terrorism and efforts to curb it.

Since its independence from the British in 1957 there had been few exchanges of visits at the highest level. Trade between the two countries remained at its lowest and political contacts were bare minimum. Only important relationship between the two was the presence of a substantial strength of the population of Indian origin in Malaysia. This population has also been a bone of contention as successive governments of Malaysia have followed the policy of favouring the locals over and above the ethnic Indians. This has many a times adversely affected the mutual relations. Due to the convergence of mutual interests in an economically globalizing world the relations have improved in the recent times. Malaysia has changed its previous hesitant approach towards India. Since the launch of the Look East policy,
bilateral relations have considerably improved. Rising trade between them has made India as Malaysia’s biggest trading partner in the South Asian region. Similarly, Malaysia is now India’s second biggest trading partner in ASEAN. Bilateral Trade has grown at an average annual rate of 20.3% during the last 10 years.

Malaysia has invariably supported India’s Look East policy and has emphasized to intensify cooperation at the bilateral, regional and international level. Summing up the past 17 years of India’s look East policy Syed Hamid Albar, Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs once spoke in New Delhi:49

"Malaysia welcomes India’s ‘Look East Policy’ and its desire to develop closer cooperation with countries in East Asia. Indeed India is playing a very important role in enhancing its relations with ASEAN. We are confident through its active participation in ASEAN as well as the ASEAN Regional Forum, collaboration between India and ASEAN and between South Asian countries and ASEAN countries can be harnessed to generate greater benefits for the peoples of both regions. Malaysia is also pleased to see India playing a significant role in East Asia Summit meetings.

In the field of trade and investment, it has been further strengthened and diversified. India indeed is an important and long-standing economic partner.... In 2006, trade between Malaysia and India had reached USD6.58 billion, an increase from USD5.03 billion in 2005, which in percentage term is 23.7%. However, there is still greater potential to expand the quantum of trade and investment between us. Malaysia would like to see more investments from Indian companies especially in high technology and knowledge-driven industries. India as a leading producer of computer software could complement Malaysia’s hardware manufacturing capabilities. A number of major Indian companies including TLC Industries, Ranbaxy, PAN Century, SM Chemicals and Godrej are already operating in Malaysia....

I look forward to the day when our extensive cooperation and far-reaching partnership will engender a collective capability that will enable us to jointly collaborate on the world stage and compete for economic opportunities. We should optimize our individual strengths and more importantly, proven track records to work together. I am of the view that much can be gained by Malaysian entrepreneurs and businessmen in engaging their Indian counterparts to compete for opportunities in India’s economic growth. Malaysian companies can also learn from the experience of their Indian counterparts in the field of enterprise and entrepreneurship as well as human capital development....
Malaysia is keen to significantly upgrade its strategic relations with India at the bilateral, regional and international levels, and together we could make this happen. We believe regional security would be enhanced through the sharing of prosperity. On the other hand, our security and economic wellbeing will be threatened by marginalization and poverty of our neighbours. In this context, Malaysia looks forward to continue working with India in strengthening the voice of the developing countries in NAM, G77, and WTO and in other international fora.”

Malaysian response to India’s tilt towards Southeast Asia can be seen in different ways. For instance, Malaysia contributed US$ 100,000 and dispatched a Special Malaysian Disaster Assistance and Relief Team (SMART) when a devastating earthquake hit Gujarat in 2000.50 The growing closeness compelled Malaysia to change its previous view on the Kashmir issue and accept the Indian position that the issue could be resolved only through bilateral negotiations.51 Malaysia condemned the bombings of trains and railway stations in Mumbai on 11 July, 2006 and assured its continuous cooperation with India to fight against international terrorism.52

Apart from verbal assurances, many high level visits have been exchanged between the two countries. Visits by important Malaysian leaders testified the growing positive response of Malaysia towards India and its policies towards East Asia. After the launch of the look East policy bilateral visits have increased notably.53 This indicates the perceptible shift towards India in the changing global economic environment.

Primary Industry Minister, Dr. Lim King Yiak visited India in April 2000 to discuss the differential rate of duty on palm oil and Samy Vellu, Minister for Works, in June 2000 to pursue various infrastructure projects. A 36 member trade and investment delegation also visited India. Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Abdul Kadir visited to promote tourism. Minister for Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin visited in November 2000 to quell the adverse publicity spread in Malaysia about the Indian meat products.54

Though the relations between the two began changing towards a new high after 1992, Prime Minister of Malaysia’s visit to India in December 2004 became an important turning point. He was accompanied by five senior Ministers, a number of senior officials and a large high profile business delegation. During this visit Prime Minister proposed setting up a Free Trade Area between Malaysia and Malaysia. To
resolve the long standing misunderstandings and contentious issue of ethnic Indians, India tried to rope in the Malaysians of Indian origin. Similarly many other ministers and Parliamentary delegations visited India to promote bilateral relations.

With these visits the bilateral relations improved significantly paving way for economic cooperation between the two countries. In January 2005 Malaysia organized a conference entitled “India-The Emerging Economic Giant” in Kuala Lumpur. Emphasizing the need for a viable economic relationship, (while addressing the conference), the Prime Minister of Malaysia said:

“I look forward to the strengthening the strong and growing friendship between our two countries I look forward to the day when our extensive cooperation and far-reaching partnership will engender a collective capability that we can take to the world stage together. With the goodwill I encountered on my trip to India and in the spirit of our renewed relationship, the day is not far when Malaysian and Indian industry can join forces to collectively compete for economic opportunities at the global level. While India can confidently attract Malaysian business and investment, Malaysia’s long running commitment to overall economic development has uniquely positioned us to offer many advantages to Indian industry. Malaysia’s strategic geographical location and business-friendly government provide ideal opportunities for Indian business to invest and grow. Furthermore, Malaysia can effectively act as a hub or gateway for Indian conglomerates and enterprises to expand in the ASEAN and East Asian markets…

There is much Malaysia can contribute in this regard where we have demonstrable strengths and importantly, proven track records. Malaysian entrepreneurs and businessmen should strategically engage with their Indian counterparts and the Indian government, and fully compete for opportunities in this aspect of India’s growth. Meanwhile, Malaysian companies can learn a lot from their Indian counterparts in the field of enterprise and entrepreneurship, as well as in human capital development. That is why education and human resource development will be important elements in the Malaysia India closer economic cooperation agreement…
Beyond industry, I am keen to enhance our tourism ties as this sector not only contributes to our respective economies, but also enhances familiarity and understanding between our two peoples. Some 150,000 Malaysians come to India each year, and an equal number of Indians visit Malaysia. I hope to see these numbers grow more rapidly as we seek to enhance our people-to-people ties. As India grows and aspires to become an international economic powerhouse, so too Malaysia marches towards its vision of fully developed status by the year 2020. Let us take this journey together, hand-in-hand, as friends and partners. Let us use each other’s strengths and have each other to count upon. I am here to tell you that Malaysia is keen to significantly upgrade its economic relationship with India, and will do its part to make this happen.

Malaysian considers India as an eligible candidate on account of its size, population and economy to join the UN Security Council. He also supported India’s entry into East Asia Summit. Malaysia’s interest in India can also be seen through a large number of MoUs which were signed in different fields and at different levels (government and private) between the two countries.

Malaysia’s response to Look East policy has been favourable. However, there are issues which occasionally erupt due to growing intolerance and discrimination against ethnic Indian population in Malaysia. Nonetheless, growing economic relations, increasing visits by the Malaysian leaders to India and its support on Kashmir issue, support for permanent seat in the Security Council ad support for India’s entry into ASEAN Regional Forum provided enough testimony of Malaysia’s favourable response to India’s East Asian drive since 1992.

Singapore

Singapore is the cornerstone in India’s look East policy. During the last fifteen years, Singapore consistently helped India in successful realization of this policy. Singapore promptly responded in the form of its ‘Look West’ policy and ‘mild India Fever’ programmes. Of all the Southeast Asian countries Singapore probably is the only one fancying the imagination of a common Indian. It always had a consistent
relationship with India. Singapore’s pro-West and US policies and India’s close relationship with Soviet Union had created apprehensions in the mind of Singapore’s leaderships in past. However, growing Chinese presence along with India’s special interest in the Southeast Asian countries has paved the way to bring the two closer than ever before. As the world changed from strategic relationship to economic one, the partnership between India and Singapore has grown in various sectors of economy.

During the last one and a half decade, Singapore has played a central role in making India a dialogue partner of ASEAN, it lobbied hard to get India the membership of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and also to bring India into ASEAN Summit meetings. Singapore has also been instrumental in getting India on board the East Asia Summit, despite Chinese opposition. Singapore ardently advocated a greater role for India in Asia-Pacific and was first to sign a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India. It played a catalytic role in developing India’s business linkages with Southeast Asia. In order to promote closer links with Indian entrepreneurs, first Global Indian Entrepreneurs Conference was organized by the Singapore Chamber of Commerce and Industry in June 1996 at the asking of Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong. The move was also supported by Singapore’s Economic Development Board.

Singapore has responded to the Look East policy in a big way and has prompted India to reinforce it. Acknowledging India’s potential in trained technical manpower, Goh Chok Tong said, “I know India places importance to relations with the U.S. and Europe but I want India should look towards South-East Asia, ASEAN and Singapore and that "India is losing some people to the Silicon Valley and I hope you would lose some to Singapore," he said. He also sought a larger participation of Indian experts in Information Technology sector of Singapore.

Both the countries have shared perceptions on various issues and have stood together on certain issues in the United Nations, Non-Aligned Movement, Commonwealth and the World Trade Organization. Singapore voted along with India on the issues like right to self determination to the people of Palestine, promotion and protection of human rights, on the situation of human rights in North Korea and Iraq, and peaceful use of nuclear energy etc. In the wake of China’s extended naval forays in South China Sea and eastern Indian Ocean, Singapore has supported India’s geo-strategic initiatives and the military presence in the Asia-Pacific Both the
countries believed in a credible and effective United Nations and support UN reforms. It favours the expansion of the UN Security Council and supports India for a permanent seat in the Security Council. 55

Since early 1990s, Singapore has dispatched a large number of delegations and officials to India to cement its relations. This can be seen from the fact that Singapore Prime Ministers visited India in 1994, 2000, 2003, 2004, and 2005. Similarly, its deputy Prime Minister visited India in 1992 and 2004. Apart from these high level visits, its ministers and other dignitaries have visited India from time to time since the launch of the Look East policy.66

Singapore has shown a common resolve with India to fight against terrorism and created a Joint Working Group for Intelligence Cooperation, combat terrorism and transnational organized crime. Security concerns have led Singapore to support India’s naval presence in the Indian Ocean. It signed a Defence Cooperation Agreement with India in October 2003 and established the Defence Policy Dialogue under its auspices. There has also been an increased bilateral interaction of their Armed Forces which include joint exercises, training arrangements, and cooperation in defence technology research.

Singapore has signed a number of MoUs, to improve economic and commercial relations. Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement, signed between the two in 2004 is another example of India’s eastward extension to improve economic ties. These initiatives have been favorably responded as evident from a speech of Singapore’s Minister of Information. He said:67

“Indian companies can use Singapore as a useful platform to network and find partners to expand their global operations. Singapore's relations with India have been growing from strength to strength. Both countries have been working together to set up the right frameworks for both countries to interact and understand each other better. For example, the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) signed in 2004 has been useful in creating more awareness about the potential of India and encouraging the formation of more linkages between our two countries. Our growing economic ties have thus seen bilateral trade tripled from S$6.9 billion in 2001 to S$19.9 billion. India has also emerged as the fastest growing trading partner for Singapore and is now Singapore's 12th largest trading partner. Singapore companies have also been investing in India. In 2006 alone, Singapore's total investments amounted to US$ 620 million which comprises 5.6% of all FDI into India.”
Singapore has also emphasized to intensify people-to-people cooperation. President of Singapore while speaking on the occasion of President A P J Abdul Kalam’s visit to that country in February 2006, said:68

“We (Singapore and India) are at the beginnings of a new century. New opportunities are awaiting the countries that are prepared to seize them. A rapidly rising India can contribute in many ways to growth and stability in Asia. This is why Singapore sought deeper engagement between ASEAN and India, and supported India’s inclusion in the recent East Asia Summit. It is also why we have backed India’s bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. This is not out of sentiment, but because of India’s growing international influence and contributions to the region’s progress, security and stability. …

Our relations with India are broad-based and robust, and underscore the similar outlook we share on a range of issues. We are natural strategic partners and have developed strong defence ties. We also share a commitment to enhance co-operation in several areas as well as fight global terrorism. Over the years, our leaders have built good rapport with one another through regular visits and dialogue...

In addition to exchanges at the government-to-government level, we recognize the importance of nurturing ties between our peoples. To this end, we have seeded several new initiatives to strengthen people-to-people interactions so that friendship, understanding and respect among them will take deep root. One of these initiatives is the India-Singapore Parliamentary Forum, which was launched during Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s visit to India last year. The Forum was set up to enable our Parliamentarians to engage one another regularly and strengthen linkages between our Parliaments. Another initiative is the Singapore-India Partnership Foundation, which was officially launched last month by Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong. The Foundation aims to promote stronger linkages through the award of fellowships and scholarships to outstanding individuals of both countries. …

Singapore is also a growing tourist destination for Indians. More than half a million Indians visited Singapore in 2005. This makes India one of the top five markets for generating visitors to Singapore. Likewise, many Singaporeans visit India for holidays. Opportunities for the expansion of Bilateral Tourism are there for both countries to develop. About 7 percent of Singapore’s population is of Indian origin and a significant proportion is second-generation Indians who may still have relatives in India.”
Feeling concerned about the growing incidents of terrorism in India, its President and Prime Minister sent condolence messages when bomb blasts took place in Mumbai trains and strongly condemned these incidents. Singapore contributed US$ 50,000 to the Prime Minister Relief Fund for the victims of Gujarat earthquake in January 2001. During the Kashmir earthquake in October 2005, Singapore expressed grief at the loss of life and property.

Singapore has welcomed India as a ‘partner’ in the city state’s economic project- "Global Entrepolis" and viewed its growing Indian connection with "great satisfaction". It eyes on the large Indian market which offers abundance of opportunities for its companies to explore and capitalize on. Singapore regards the Look East policy is viewed with respect and meaning which has produced a ‘dramatic’ impact in South East Asia. Thus various initiatives taken by Singapore after the launch of the Look East policy to strengthen ties with India indicate a good response to the Policy.

**Thailand**

After independence, India tried to build a mutually beneficial relationship with Thailand. The Cold War priorities and latter’s joining the American treaty system as a member of SEATO, however, created a cleavage between the two. As a result the bilateral relations between them remained at a low pace. End of the Cold War in early 1990s, forced the Asian leaderships to rethink and redirect their destinies in the fast changing global environment. As India took to economic reforms, Thailand too reshaped and rekindled its relations with the neighbours including India. In the process, bilateral relations gradually transformed from being ideological opposites during the Cold War to reconciled neighbours who needed each other. Thailand and India have closely cooperated at various international fora such as United Nations and the World Trade Organization. Both the countries expressed common views on various issues facing the world and voted together in these forums.

Thailand regarded India as an important partner. When Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited Southeast Asia 1993 to declare Look East policy, Thailand was the first destination. As India embarked on the “Look East” policy, it was reciprocated by Thailand with declaring its intentions to build a new partnership with India. In 1996 Thailand declared its “Look West” policy with an intention to accord priority to the development of relations with countries on the Indian sub-continent.
In response to India’s Look East policy, Thailand supported India on the reforms of United Nations Security Council and that the current composition of the UNSC does not reflect contemporary realities. It agrees with India on the expansion of the Security Council and makes India its permanent member. Thailand has intended to bring India close through BIMSTEC, in order to encourage cooperation among the countries of the Bay of Bengal. It has welcomed India’s efforts through Mekong Ganga Cooperation and has made efforts to build a comprehensive economic and security partnership with India.75

Located very close to international trade route connecting Indian Ocean with South China Sea, growing Chinese naval presence and its setting up bases in Myanmar has always worried Thailand. As an alternative it has sought defence cooperation with India. Since the launch of the Look East policy defence cooperation between the two countries has increased. Thailand recognizes terrorism as a major threat to global security. Keeping in view the defence and security needs Thailand established a Joint Working Group with India on Security Cooperation for closer cooperation. This includes joint patrolling of the sea in order to stamp out piracy and drug trafficking.76

After 1992 Thailand has sent high level business delegations to India. Many of the Thai Prime Ministers have visited India since then. Even the visits of the members of the Thai Royal families indicate that India is a favoured destination for them. Similarly many other ministers and high dignitaries also visited India. Both the countries signed “India-Thailand Agenda: 2000 AD”, in July 2000 to expand cooperation in education, culture, health, agriculture, security, transport, tourism.77

During 2001 a high powered delegation led by the Thai Prime Minister visited Indian Space Research Organization, the Software Technology Park of India, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd., and Infosys. Thai leaders affirmed their commitment to build a strong bilateral relationship that addresses contemporary political, economic and social issues through synergy and coordinated planning. Speaking during his visit, Prime Minister said, “The primary focus of my visit is, first, to strengthen bilateral relations between our two countries, especially in economic, trade and scientific areas. We wish to reinforce the close bonds of friendship between India and Thailand on a broad front. Secondly, we wish to explore and build on the considerable strength, expertise and skills of both nations to promote a new level of economic and interactive cooperation to generate economic growth and prosperity in the region.

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Thirdly, we wish to enhance a direct dialogue with our counterparts on a personal dimension. In fact, we would like India to contribute more to our regions' scientific and technological development, especially in the area of information technology. This is an area in which India has made most remarkable progress and can certainly make a positive contribution to our region”.

India also welcomed — albeit cautiously— the Thai initiative to set up the ‘Asian Security Dialogue (ASD).’

Thai Foreign Affairs Minister while on a visit in July 2001, strongly advocated Thai-India partnership in trade and investment. During his speech at FICCI, he said:

“Thailand and India have long enjoyed close and cordial ties. Throughout these years, our warm friendship has flourished and our relations expanded covering wide areas of cooperation. India shares a common border with ASEAN, and shares a common ocean with Thailand, namely the Indian Ocean. Our geographical proximity and historical cultural ties continue to bind our two countries and peoples. In this spirit of friendship, the Thai Government is actively pursuing the "Look West Policy" with a view to enhancing cordial relations and promoting constructive cooperation with India and South Asia. Likewise, I am encouraged by India’s "Look East Policy" towards countries in my region which include Thailand. India is, therefore, high on our list of potential partners in terms of trade and investment as both countries have much to offer one another....

Indeed, my visit to India is a part of Thailand’s commitment to pursue closer and a more comprehensive economic ties with India in the spirit of partnership. We regard you as a partner in the region. We want to get you more involved. The opportunities are there for us to seize and utilize for mutual growth and shared prosperity....”

Thai Foreign Affairs Minister visited again in June and November 2004. In June 2005, the Thailand Prime Minister, Thaksin Sinawatra led a high level delegation and in September the first Thai Deputy Speaker of the House of the Representatives, visited India followed by a visit by their Energy Ministers in October to attend BIMSTEC Energy Minister Meeting. Foreign Minister of Thailand, Dr. Kantathi Suphamongkhon visited India in August 2006 ahead of the 9th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting. To strengthen defence cooperation, top brass of the Thai defence establishment visited India. Similarly, in 2007 many of the high level political leaders and other official paid visit.
Response to the Look East policy can be judged from a speech by the Prime Minister of Thailand delivered during the Business Summit organized by FICCI in New Delhi on 26 June, 2007. He said:

“Thailand regards India as the most important strategic partner. Our cooperation has developed in both bilateral and multilateral fora in all sectors, including trade, investment, security, transport, science and technology, energy, technical cooperation and culture. Our growing partnership is the outcome of the synergy between India's "Look East" Policy and Thailand's "Look West" Policy. These two policies complement one another in making our relations the vibrant and dynamic partnership we are witnessing today....

“In the regional context, our partnership has also been strengthened through frameworks such as the ASEAN-India Dialogue, BIMSTEC, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), ARF and the East Asia Summit. Thailand appreciates India's active participation and constructive role in all these initiatives. In this age of globalization where nations and businesses constantly search for new opportunities, I believe that Thailand and India already possess the necessary resources to make use of our untapped opportunities. But to fully realize our potentials, we need to do more to synergize our bilateral and regional cooperation. We need to do more to strengthen our partnership and maximize our comparative advantages. For both governments, this means further strengthening our economic partnership, deepening our linkages, minimizing barriers and maximizing access for our products and capital. My Government commits itself to doing this....

On investments, Thailand now accounts for around 830 million US dollars of approved foreign direct investment in India, ranking 18th in India's total FDI. Top investment sectors include food processing, hotel and tourism, construction and electrical equipment, telecommunications, trading and transportation. India's FDI in Thailand has also risen, with the first quarter of 2007 seeing an increase of 110 percent over the same period last year. From these facts and figures, India has every opportunity to become Thailand's major market for trade and investment. I therefore wish to thank the Indian Government and private sector for welcoming and supporting Thai investors. On our part we welcome with open arms Indian investment, particularly in areas in which India has expertise, such as information technology and pharmaceuticals.”
During these years Thailand has increased cooperation with India in biotechnology, software and information technology, biodiversity, space technology and has invited many IT professionals from India. Tourism between the two countries has grown and air traffic has increased between the two countries. Thailand has allowed and encouraged the Indian corporate sector to establish joint ventures in promising areas such as auto parts, food processing, construction, IT and fisheries. At the humanitarian level too Thailand has come relatively close to India. During the Gujarat earthquake, Thailand donated US$50,000 towards the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund. Trade has increased from US$ 1.1 billion to US$ 3.4 billion in 2006 and India’s total share in Thailand’s foreign trade has increased from 0.85 per cent to 1.06 percent during this period. 86

Thailand, therefore, has consistently appreciated India’s growing involvement with Southeast Asia. As a response to the Look East Policy, it formulated the Look West policy to show the equal and matching enthusiasm to build close relations with India. As a result India-Thailand relations have improved, trade and investment has grown and mutual trust has strengthened. Thailand has unequivocally supported the Look East policy.

Myanmar

Myanmar with a military government since 1962 is definitely a difficult country to deal with for a democratic India. Its moral support to the pro-democracy forces, growing influence of Pakistan and China in Myanmar, state sponsored subjugation of ethnic Indian population and use of Myanmar’s territory by the insurgents in India’s northeast have dominated the relations between the two countries since their independence. Despite its military regime India can not ignore Myanmar as it shares a long border with India. Throughout Cold War India and Myanmar did not have good neighbourly relations. Its emerging strategic equation with China and post-Cold war geo-economic realities compelled India to redraft its policy towards Myanmar. This was also one of the reasons to frame a policy towards the Eastern countries.

Myanmar has faced sanctions at the hands of the United States and European Union. Its regime has attracted criticism due to human rights violations. Myanmar has virtually been isolated from the international community and was not a member of any regional grouping for a long time. This has rendered Myanmar a country starved
only China has undertaken some projects to develop its infrastructure. With growing domestic restlessness, its military leadership realized that China alone cannot satisfy its needs and Myanmar has been compelled to open up to the world. Improvement in relations with India is thus due to internal compulsions which have coincided with a change in Indian policy towards Myanmar. In recent years, it has supported India's position on restructuring the UN Security Council and Myanmar has supported India for a Permanent Membership in the Security Council. Both the countries have voted together on many issues in the United Nations and other international bodies. Myanmar seems inclined to work closely to promote regional cooperation in various organizations like ASEAN, BIMSTEC and MGC.

India and Myanmar have a porous border criss-crossing the land and tribal communities. India has often accused Myanmar for its support to the insurgent groups operating in the north-east. These insurgents seek refuge across the border and strike at will inside the Indian territory causing loss to life and property. In the recent years Myanmar has given assurance to India that it would not allow these groups to use its territory. It has agreed to cooperate with India to combat terrorism and ensure peace, and stability on the border. When Bhairon Singh Sekhawat visited Myanmar in November 2003, the Vice-Chairman of State Peace and Development Council expressed gratitude on behalf of the Government of Myanmar for the extension of a credit line of 25 million dollars to Myanmar and reiterated their resolve to fight terrorism. Both the leaders expressed their commitment to intensify efforts to prevent, counter and suppress the activities of terrorist groups and to cooperate in this regard.

Myanmar sent its Vice Foreign Minister to in August 1992 who expressed willingness to improve relations with India and hoped that India would be patient about the revival of democracy in Myanmar. He further desired to work together to protect their security and strategic interests and emphasized to increase economic and technological cooperation. Both the countries signed a MoU in January 1994 to increase cooperation between the civilian border authorities of the two countries and to prevent “illegal and insurgent activities”. A bilateral agreement was also signed to regularize and promote border trade. Deputy Home Minister of Myanmar visited India in 1995 and reiterated the need to boost bilateral trade. Efforts were also made to explore possibility of India’s participation in Myanmar’s agriculture, and cooperation in the field of science and technology.
In November 2000 Vice Chairman SPDC visited India to expand the bilateral relations and seek India’s help to establish cross-border transport and communication infrastructure. Myanmar also sought India’s participation in the realization of Tamanthi hydroelectric project and the Kaladan river navigation, road and gas pipeline project. In October 2004 Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of SPDC, paid a visit to India. It was the first Head of State visit from Myanmar in 24 years and the first interaction between the two countries at this level in 17 years. During this visit India was assured that Myanmar would not allow its territory to be used for hostile activity against India and expressed great interest in furthering co-operation in the fields of infrastructure projects and energy.

Myanmar and India have moved closer after 1992 and the Look East policy has played a role in it. Myanmar has opened up to the changing economic realities and has started to move closer to India. Responding to the Look East policy, Myanmar’s Senior General spoke on October 25, 2004 at Rashtrpati Bahvan. He said:

“...We are pleased to note that trade between our two countries is growing steadily. However, there is room for further expansion as what has been achieved so far is quite modest when compared to the immense potential that exists for both border and normal trade. In this age of globalization, Myanmar considers that closer cooperation among neighbouring countries is essential to meet the new challenges we face. In this regard, Myanmar welcomes India’s "Look East" policy and its commitment to strengthen economic linkages and developmental cooperation with the ASEAN countries. Myanmar takes pride that we are regarded as your gateway to ASEAN. We will continue to work closely with India, both bilaterally and in the framework of regional groupings, such as BIMST-EC, ASEAN, ACD and the Ganga-Mekong cooperation to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the region. In view of the large strides taken by India in recent years, we have no doubt that it will achieve its goal of joining the ranks of developed nations by the year 2020. As an immediate neighbour of your great country, we take pride in your achievements and rejoice with you. We welcome India’s willingness to share its expertise in a number of areas, including science and technology and the IT sector....”

After 1993 India’s cooperation with Myanmar has proceeded in a wide range of areas such as infrastructure, human resource development, industry, railways, oceanography, science & technology. Both have agreed to expand bilateral
cooperation in various fields like health, energy, ICT and higher education. Bilateral trade between the two countries has grown five fold to reached to US$ 1070 million in 2006 from US$ 202.4 million in 1996. To further strengthen the relations, Myanmar responded to India’s gestures through a number of visits at various levels. During these visits the areas of mutual interest were explored at the bilateral, regional and international level. In 2005, Myanmar agreed in principle on construction of a gas pipeline to India in order to meet latter’s energy needs and extend cooperation in energy sector. Myanmar’s growing interest in India’s defense sector can be judged from various bilateral visits of high level defense officials. President APJ Abdul Kalam visited Myanmar in March 2006 (first visit by an Indian President) and many MoUs were signed on cooperation in the petroleum sector, Buddhist studies, remote sensing etc. Thus after a long spell of cold relationship, India adopted a policy of greater engagement with Myanmar. After the launch of Look East policy, India gave a special attention to Myanmar. It also decided not to interfere in Myanmar’s internal affairs. Since then, there has been a visible enhancement of economic cooperation between the two countries. Myanmar is coming to terms with the changing global realities and has responded slowly but positively to Look East policy.

**Impact on Evolving Relationship**

India and the select countries of Southeast Asia have undertaken economic reforms by liberalizing their economies in the post-Cold War era. They are dynamic markets and their economic relations have impressively grown over the past 15 years. The emerging partnership could prove an important building bloc of regional economic cooperation in Asia. It could help to build an Asian Economic Community in a phased manner. The ditched relations of the Cold War era have given way to various mechanisms developed bilaterally and through ASEAN to build economic cooperation for the mutual benefit.

The launching of Look East policy in 1992 has evolved positive response from ASEAN as well as the select countries of Southeast Asia. Geographical proximity, common agenda of economic cooperation and concerns about security threats that stalk the world today, have played a significant role in galvanizing this emerging relationship. India’s other East Asian initiatives such as the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and BIMSTEC etc. have drawn considerable recognition from these
countries. It may be loud thinking that the gap between India and Southeast Asia is rapidly closing or they have converging concerns and interests. There are other outside powers at play in that region and prospects of India’s relations with them in future depend on the level of the presence of other outside powers. The overall impact of all trends and forces at play in Southeast Asia, on their relationship with India has been encouraging. In future they are likely to brace up to meet the challenges. The impact of Look East policy on evolving relationship can be seen in perceptible upward change in India’s relations with each select country.

Over the years, India’s relations with Indonesia have reached a new level of understanding. Bilateral cooperation between the two countries in trade and commerce, education, industry, agriculture, defence, science and technology has firmly established through a number of agreements, declarations and MoUs. Apart from bilateral defence cooperation, the two countries are engaged in addressing non-traditional security challenges facing the region such as terrorism and maritime piracy. Responding to Look East policy, Indonesia has supported India not only at bilateral level but also at the regional and international fora. However, there is a large scope and potential for further cooperation. Both are keen to expand and diversify trade and cooperate in the fields of education, industry, science and technology, defence, energy etc. India’s professionals, IT experts, doctors and engineers are working in Indonesia. They have considerable scope of helping each other in application of biotechnology, and other knowledge intensive activities to improve productivity in agriculture and food-processing. Infrastructure development, particularly in railways, aviation and in commercialization of space activities are other potential areas for their cooperation. Joint security of the sea lanes and fight against the menace of terrorism are yet other important areas of mutual help and cooperation.

India and Indonesia now share a common strategic perception in the field of energy security and counter-terrorism. India considers its relation with Indonesia as the key to its larger engagement with the ASEAN grouping and central to Indo-ASEAN equation. India fully supports the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Indonesia. It has also condemned all forms of terrorist activities taking place in India. This relationship is likely to touch new heights, based on a common understanding of rapidly changing geo-political scenario in Southeast Asia.

India and Malaysia have good neighborly relations. Both have supported each other in time crises. After the launch of Look East policy, bilateral cooperation
between the two countries has accelerated and supported each other’s views on various issues in NAM, the G-15, the G-77, the Commonwealth, the WTO, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit. Despite these developments, there have been some problems in the recent past between the two countries regarding the maltreatment of ethnic Indians. Despite having such internal problematic political issues, a rapidly globalizing Malaysian economy cannot bear the cost of isolating itself from India which is a vibrant marketplace and a source of both skilled and non-skilled manpower.

As an impact of the Look East policy, relations between India and Malaysia have improved manifold. Malaysia became India’s trading partner with more than five time increase in trade. Exports to India have increased seven times and its FDI stood at 450 US$ in 2004. Many Indian companies are operating in Malaysia and large number of Indian joint-ventures are based in Malaysia. Due to this emerging geo-economic equation, opportunities have come up in the fields of infrastructure, engineering, ICT and human resources. Both are keen to further enhance the prospects for collaboration in health care, education, biotechnology, and business process outsourcing. Malaysia regards India as an emerging international power house and intends to utilize the shared history and similarly of cultures and conduits within which both can move effectively towards even greater bilateral relations and economic cooperation.102

India and Singapore have developed a very strong partnership, which covers areas of cooperation such trade, tourism, security and defence. The strength and intensity of bilateral economic relations can be seen in the fact that Singapore is India’s important trading partner among ASEAN countries. While the Look East policy led to an overall expansion of India’s trade with Singapore, the CECA has further strengthened the nature and scope of bilateral economic relations. Both the countries have made many efforts through exchange of bilateral visits, joint declarations and MoUs. Singapore has played an instrumental role getting India sectoral dialogue partnership in 1992, full dialogue partnership in 1995, membership of ARF in 1996 and ASEAN-India Summit in 2002. Indian professionals and IT experts are outsourced to Singapore and tourism has expanded. Singapore and India cooperate to secure the sea lanes piracy, marine terrorism and drug trafficking etc.

India’s relations with Singapore have seen many ups and downs. From closeness of 1960s to drift in relations, both have evolved close relationship after
India’s Look East policy. Common threat perceptions like terrorism and maritime piracy and the predictability of China’s long-terms objectives and intentions in Southeast Asia has given a fillip to their defence cooperation. They have created many bilateral mechanisms in this regard. It is also the impact of Look East policy that India is no more a country “mired in despair and disrepair” and Singapore now evinces considerable admiration for India’s functioning democracy, political stability and multi-part system.

Look East policy set a stage for consolidation of bilateral relations between India-Thailand. Investment has increased, trade between two countries has gone up manifold and Thailand now ranks as the third largest investor (after Singapore and Malaysia) in India form the ASEAN. After 2001, economic and commercial links between the two have grown, both the countries have exchanged many high level visits and have signed a large number of agreements. As an impact of the Policy, Thailand and India are cooperating in ARF, the East Asia Summit, BIMSTEC and trilateral linkages (with Thailand, Myanmar and India). India is a member of Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) initiated by Thailand in 2002 and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. Both are likely to implement Free Trade Area agreement. India Studies Centers at some Thai Universities and teaching of Hindi and Sanskrit in its institutions of higher learning are just a few indications of the impact of the Look East policy on the evolving relationship.

India and Myanmar had strained relations ever since the overthrow of democratic government by its armed forces in 1962. After 1993, India changed its policy and began cultivate ties with Myanmar. India made coordinated effort with Myanmar to develop its Northeast region and initiated a strategic policy to contain Chinese influence in Myanmar. India has engaged Myanmar through ASEAN and BIMSTEC. Their bilateral trade had reached US$ 500 million making India the 4th largest trading partner and second largest export market for Myanmar. They have extended their air, land and sea routes and worked to construct a gas pipeline. In February 2001, 160 km ‘Indo-Myanmar Friendship Road’ was inaugurated to provide a major strategic and commercial route. Naval cooperation between the two countries has grown and Myanmar’s ships took part in ‘Milan 2006’ for the first time. They have common concern and strategy to fight the narco-terrorism. Hence the Look East has played a significant role to influence the relations between India and Myanmar.
After exploring the response of the select countries of Southeast Asia to the Look East policy, we now turn to see the presence of other outside powers viz., China, Japan, USA, Australia and Britain in the region and its implication for India.

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5. From the Indonesian President’s statement during his visit to Pakistan in November 2005. See, Pak, Indonesia Pledge to Bolster Economic Cooperation, Stamp out Terrorism. Accessed from Indonesia Embassy in Islamabad, http://server.kbri-islamabad.go.id/
8. The ASEAN states have taken advantage of India's Look East policy to invite the Indian military into the region. India now has the annual "Milan" military exercise with ASEAN, as well as separate exercises with Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. See, Chan, Stanley: Quiet Power: ASEAN, Asia Times Online, 10 August, 2002; India’s Naval Posture: Looking East, Strategic Comments, Vol. 11, No. 6, August 2005, pp. 1-2.
12. Ibid.,
Under the BIMSTEC, Myanmar and Thailand have initiated cooperation with India. Under the Mekong Ganga Cooperation, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand have sought to develop cooperation with India. See, Nanda, Rediscovering Asia, op. cit., p. 493.


Naidu, India and Southeast Asia: Look East Policy, op. cit., p. 10.


Jafferlot, op. cit., p. 47.

Singh, Udai Bhanu: India and the ARF, op. cit., p. 79.


The First Meeting of the ASEAN-India Joint Cooperation Committee (AJJCC) was held in New Delhi in November 1996. The AJJCC agreed to set up two working groups, one on science and technology, the other on trade and investment. The committee recognized India’s expertise in the fields of science and technology and sought further consolidation of cooperation in areas which include advanced materials, bio-technology and Information technology. Indian expertise was also sought in food processing, health, agriculture, engineering, electronics, communications and services. The Fifth AJJCC meeting was held in April 2003 in New Delhi to review the progress. See, Singh, Udai Bhanu: India and the ARF, op. cit., p. 79.

These working groups are operational at the technical level; and they have contributed to the improvement of ASEAN-India ties in various sectors of the economies. See, Jha, Pankaj Kumar: Reassessing India’s Look East Policy, World Focus, Vol. 24, No. 10-11-12, October-November-December, 2003, p.18.

The first meeting was held in 1998 and the second in 1999. The discussions covered a wide range of issues like the international arena and political, economic cooperation. See, The Hindu, 3 January, 2001.


Singh and Yadav, in Sondhi and Tyagi, op. cit., p. 236.
30 Though Southeast Asia has accepted the US role in their security but sensed that the U.S. had its own agenda and would be guided purely by its own economic and security interests in the region. See, Jayanth V, “The Political Dimensions”, in Seminar 487, Looking East, March 2000, New Delhi.
33 It was launched in March 1997 with the aim to create bridgehead between Africa, Asia and Australia. From the point of view of India’s ‘Look East’ policy, it is pertinent to mention here because apart from India, five countries from ASEAN are its member. See, Nanda, Praksh: Another International Organization, The Times of India, 3 May, 1997.
41 In 2005, many visits of the Indonesian President including Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Trade, Tourism and Culture, Agriculture and Health visited India. A major official delegation including the Coordinating Minister for Economy, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Trade, Defence, Industry, State Secretary, Chief of Air Staff and the President of the Kadin accompanied the President. New Strategic Partnership was signed between India and Indonesia during this visit See, Annual Report 2005-06, Ministry of External Affairs, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
43 *Ibid.*, 172

Leaders from both the countries reiterated support for the ongoing reform of the United Nations and its principal organs. They stressed the importance of an early restructuring of the UN Security Council to make its decision making processes more democratic, transparent and responsive to the realities of the world today. They stressed that such a restructuring of the Council entailed that the developing world be adequately represented through permanent members on the Council. See, Joint Declaration between the Republic of India and the Republic of Indonesia, on 19 May, 2006. Accessed at, Indian Embassy in Jakarta, http://www.embassyofindiajakarta.org/

Malaysia's Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albaron’s interview at his office in Putra Jaya, prior to his visit to India: “We Should Work for a More Visible Malaysia-India Relationship” Cited in, The Hindu, 14 February, 2007.


Samy Vellu (Himself a Malaysian of Indian origin) Minister of Works Malaysia visited India four times in 2004. He came along with a 160 member delegation comprising senior political leaders, businessmen and journalists, etc. He also attended Third Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, held at Mumbai in January 2005. See, Annual Report 2004-05, Ministry of External Affairs, op. cit., p. 30.

Mustapa Mohamed, Minister in Prime Minister’s Department Malaysian attended the First Ministerial Round Table Conference on Regional Cooperation in Oil and Gas Economy held in New Delhi in January 2005. Malaysian delegation to the 3rd India-ASEAN Business Summit held at New Delhi and Chennai in October 2004 was the largest from any ASEAN country as in the earlier two Summits. A parliamentary delegation led by Deputy Speaker of Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) of Malaysia Datuk Lim Si Cheng and consisting of Secretary of Parliament of Malaysia and six other officials visited India from 3-8 November 2004 to study the management and procedures of Parliament in India. The Minister of Higher Education, Mustapa Mohamed visited Mysore in June 2007 to attend the graduation ceremony of over 100 Malaysian students and lecturers trained by Infosys in applications of Information Technology in the corporate sector. S. Samy Vellu, Minister of Works visited Kerala in July 2007, during which a MoU was signed between the State Government and the Government of Malaysia for the establishment of a new Industrial Promotion Centre in Kinalur, Kozhikode. The Minister of International Trade and Industry, Rafidah Aziz led a high level business delegation to New Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai on a Trade and Investment Mission from 25 November-1 December 2007. The Governor of the Central Bank of Malaysia, Bank Negara, Dr. Zeti Akhtar Aziz visited India in November 2007, during which two separate MoUs were concluded with Indian Railways and the Indian Institute of Banking and Finance (IIBF) respectively. See, Ibid., and Annual Report 2005-06, Ministry of External Affairs, op. cit., p. 24; Annual Report 2007-08, Ministry of External Affairs, op. cit., p. 23.


Sekhar, India Singapore Relations, op. cit., p. 1.

Jayant, V: The Political Dimensions, op. cit.,


Ibid.,


See, Chetty, A Lakshmana: India and ASEAN, op. cit., p. 31; For various visits of Singapore Prime Ministers, Deputy Ministers, and other senior ministers, see, Annual Reports 1991-92 to 2007-2008, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.


Speech by President S. R. Nathan at the State Banquet held in Honour of His Excellency Dr A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, President of the Republic of India, on 1 February 2006.


Both the countries voted together in favour of equitable international order, promotion of human rights, on the situation of human rights in North Korea and Iraq, reduce nuclear danger, peaceful use of nuclear energy, right to self determination to Palestine people etc. See, United Nations General Assembly Resolution – A/RES/62/220, op. cit.,


The visit of the Foreign Minister was aimed to establish contact with the new government and again in November 2004 to participate in the Hindustan Times Conference on “India and the World” in New Delhi. Some other important visits from Thailand to India in the same year such as high-level delegation led by Governor of Phuket Province, to Port Blair in June 2004 for discussing linkages including trade & investment, tourism; Korn Thapparansi, Minister of Science & Technology to Chennai and Bangalore in July 2004 and again in November 2004 with a group of 100 students to participate in the Infosys 20-week IT Training Camp at Mysore; Dr. Pranpree Bahiddha-Nukara, Vice-Minister of Commerce in July 2004 for discussions with India’s Commerce and Industry Minister to finalize details of products to be included in the Early Harvest Scheme (E.H.S) list under the India-Thailand FTA, and again in December 2004 to sign MoU between the FICCI & FTI; Uthai Pimchaichon, Wattana Muangsook, Minister of Commerce led a high-level delegation in August 2004 and met Shri Kamal Nath, Minister of C&I for signing the protocol to implement the E.H.S under the FTA and Minister of Commerce for attending the third India-ASEAN Business Summit in New Delhi and Chennai in October 2004. See, Annual Report 2004-05, Ministry of External Affairs, op. cit., p. 36.

Some defence dignitaries like Air Chief Marshal Chalit Pukbhasuk, Commander-in-Chief, Royal Thai Air Force Air Vice Marshal Prajin Juntong, Director of Intelligence and Flt Lt Sorawat Suchart also visited India in September 2006. See, Annual Report 2006-07, Ministry of External Affairs, op. cit., p. 28.

The highlight of the year was the State visit of Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont to India from 25-27 June 2007. A MoU on Enhancement of Cooperation in the Field of Renewable Energy and the Cultural Exchange Programme for the years 2007-09 were signed during the visit. Sawanit Kongsiri, Deputy Foreign Minister led a 22-member delegation of Thai businessmen to India for a Road Show from 28 June-4 July 2007. Thailand’s Deputy Prime Minister and Industry Minister Kosit Pampiemras led a delegation of senior officials and business executives to India from 28 August-4 September 2007. A group of 14 cadets from the Chulalongkorn Royal Military Academy (CRMA) visited India from 22-29 October 2007 under the ongoing programme of cooperation with the Indian Military Academy. See, Annual Report 2007-08, Ministry of External Affairs, op. cit., pp. 27-28.


Chaudhury, Nilova Roy: Thai PM Chulanont to Visit India, Hindustan Times, 22 June 2007.
Pakistani military cooperation with Myanmar began in January 1989, shortly after the junta came to power. Strategic influence of Pakistan is growing in Myanmar since then. It regularly trains Myanmarese soldiers to operate a slew of Chinese equipment like tanks, fighter aircraft and howitzers. Myanmarese army, navy and air force officers are being provided training in Pakistan’s Military Staff College at Quetta while soldiers are reportedly undergoing training to operate 155 mm howitzers and tanks like the T-69s, T-63s and T-53s. It also sent two delegations to visit Coco Islands in 1997-98. A Pakistani presence in such close proximity to India’s northeast concerns India because of the possibility of Pakistani collaboration with insurgents. Pakistan provided ammunition to Myanmar worth at $3.2 million. This included ammunition for 7.62 mm machine guns, 77 mm rifle-launched grenades; 76 mm, 82 mm and 106 mm recoilless rifle rounds; 120 mm mortar bombs; 37 mm anti-aircraft gun ammunition and 105 mm and 155 mm artillery shells. See, Singh, Udai Bhanu: Perspective on Myanmar-India Relations, Dialogue, Volume 5, No. 3, January - March, 2004, p. 4; Bedi, Rahul: Burma-Pak-China Nexus Feared, The Asian Age, 16 November, 2000.

Allison, Tony: Myanmar shows India the road to Southeast Asia, Asia Times Online, 21 February, 2001.


Armed Forces of both the countries have cooperated closely to combat insurgency; for instance they held discussions in Kalemyo, Myanmar in November 2001. The Myanmarese army arrested several Manipur insurgents when it raided three underground camps at Tamu, Namphalong and Khunjao, near the Manipur border. These insurgents belonged to the United National Liberation, People’s Liberation Army and People’s Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak and were arrested in November. However, Myanmar refused to extradite them on the ground that they were Myanmarese. See, Singh, Udai Bhanu: Perspective on Myanmar-India Relations, op. cit., p. 5; also see, the Joint Statement on Bhairon Singh Shekhawat’s Visit to Yangon, 4 November, 2003, available at http://www.mofa.gov.mm/joint/myan_india(5nov03).html.


Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation visited India in August 1998, to explore the possibilities of India’s participation in Myanmar’s agriculture sectors. To seek cooperation of India in information technology, a 10 members high power delegation from Myanmar Computer Federation visited Bangalore and Delhi in February 1999. A delegation led by Science and Technology Minister visited in June 1999 and signed an agreement to seek cooperation in science and technology. See, Ibid., pp. 492-493.

The two countries vowed to increase economic cooperation to its full potential, curb the activities of extremist groups and drug traffickers along the Indo-Myanmar border. See, Allison, op. cit.,


Speech by Malaysian Prime Minister at the 'Malaysia-India Economic Conference 2005, at Bombay, see at, www.pmo.gov.my.