THE FORMATIVE PERIOD OF SOVIET VIEW OF ASEAN, 1967 - 1971

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was formally launched in August 1967 in Bangkok by the leaders of five Southeast Asian countries, viz. Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. This indeed was the major development for Southeast Asia. We have discussed in our earlier chapter the actual historical background of the formation of ASEAN. Suffice here to point out some of the major features of ASEAN as an organization of regional cooperation in Asia. The first and perhaps the most important was that it was not a military alliance like NATO or SEATO; on the contrary, its main thrust was towards regional cooperation on common issues of "economic growth, social progress and cultural development". Secondly, it was an overtly pro-West in its orientation yet, it intended to avoid confrontation with communist China or the Soviet Union; so much so that except traditional US allies like the Philippines and Thailand, other ASEAN countries were reluctant to get involved directly in the Vietnam war in support of the USA. Finally, the very formation of ASEAN emphasised the urge of smaller states with a common socio-economic formation to stand up jointly in facing their joint neighbour, communist China and in asserting their role collectively and individually in the affairs of Southeast Asia in particular. All these features of ASEAN are relevant for an understanding of Soviet policy towards it.

1. 10 Years ASEAN, op.cit, p.14.
We shall in this Chapter focus our attention on investigating and analysing Soviet views on ASEAN during its early formative phase from 1967-1971. To begin with, it is relevant here to attempt a critical survey of socio-economic and political condition in the region during the period under review and how this appear to affect the role of member states in ASEAN, as well as, vis-a-vis the USSR.

Socio-Economic and Political Conditions in Southeast Asia: 1967-71

Most of the states in Southeast Asia were the colonies of the West. It was only after 1945 that a process of decolonization started in this region. But the political, economic and cultural problems did not end with it. The intra-state conflicts in the region continued, while the countries of this region were not homogenous units. The population of these countries is a mixture of different racial, ethnic and linguistic groups. Thailand has Lao, Malay and some ethnic groups of Burmese origin. In Malaysia there are Malay, Chinese and Indians. Singapore also is a conglomeration of Chinese, Malay and Indian elements. The Philippines have Malay and Chinese. In Indonesia, there are Malay and Chinese minorities. Intra-racial confrontation therefore was inherent in the very structure of these states and when the nationalist governments came to power, they had to face many insurgencies of ethnic and religious colour.

To add to this, there were persistent clashes of interests regarding the boundaries. Indonesian confrontation with Malaysia continued from 1963 to 1966 over the incorporation of Sabah and Sarawak into Malaysian Federation. Indonesia also lent untiring support to the people of North borneo who were against joining the
Malaysian Federation. Again, the Philippine claim over North Borneo strained her relations with Malaysia. Due to the persistent communist activities on the Thai-Malaysian border, relations between Thailand and Malaysia were also tense. Above all, the economy of the five Southeast Asia countries - Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand - which formed ASEAN in 1967, also differ in both degree and kind. Singapore, which is appreciably industrialized, has an advance economy with the Chinese as the dominant economic class. But Malaysia and Indonesia have agrarian economy.

There were some other common regional problems. All the ASEAN countries faced internal instability from communist insurgency with covert support from China. There were underground communist parties in all the ASEAN states. They were mostly pro-Peking. Though the Indonesian government took stern measures against the communists since 1965, an underground Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) continued to be active there and its leaders Aditorop and Jawoto Deng Xiaoping were given shelter by the PRC. In Singapore, two organizations, Barisan Socialis and Nanyang University Students Union (NUSU), were pro-Peking. They had some 1,400 members in 1963. In Thailand there was a clandestine Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (T), which had about

2. In 1961, the Malaysian Prime Minister tried to balance the association of Chinese dominant Singapore in Malaysia with the inclusion of the British territories in North Borneo and Sarawak, where Malays were in majority. Therefore UN General Secretary sent a mission under Lord Cobbold to check the wishes of the inhabitants. The Commission discovered that about one-third of the people of the two territories approved the plan unconditionally, one-third approved it conditionally, and one one-third opposed it. The opponents included Chinese Party in Sarawak and the left wing of Sarawak United People's Party. Indonesia and the Philippines also opposed the plan.

3,000 members. There was also a Thai Communist Party (TCP) of about 200 members. Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was predominantly a Chinese organization. It had about 1,200 to 2,000 members. In the Philippines, there was a Communist Party of Philippines (PRP) which had two factions - pro-Peking and pro-Moscow. The pro-Peking group had an armed wing known as New Pooples' Army (NPA). The NPA according to government sources had 40,000 members with a hard core of nearly 1,000. These pro-Peking organisations within the ASEAN countries were given moral support by the PRC. A broadcast system was operated from China, known as 'Voice of Malayan Revolution'. The 'Voice of the People of Thai' was also established some where near the northern borders of Thailand.

The leaders in ASEAN countries feared the subversive activities of these pro-Peking organizations. They were anti-communists and feared expansion of communism in the region. Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew said that without Thailand as a buffer region, the spread of indigenous communists, supported by fraternal parties in the neighbouring countries is almost a foregone conclusion. Tun Abdul Razak of Malaysia also said that if Malaysia would fail to get necessary funds for its development, it may turn communist. They tried their best to suppress the insurgency movement of the communists. Malaysia and Thailand took help from Britain and America

respectively, in suppressing the communist insurgency. The Communist
guerillas were active along the 275 miles Thai-Malaysian border. Only
after 1970, these governments agreed to cooperate with each other for
anti-communist operations along the borders. Indonesia has also a
border cooperation agreement with Malaysia for anti-communist
operations in Sarawak.

The local governments were facing the problem of stateless and
overseas Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia. Though nearly 70
percent of them had been born in the countries of their residence,
many of them were still either stateless or holders of the PRC and
Taiwan citizenship. For example, in Indonesia there were 3 million
ethnic Chinese. Almost half of them have adopted Indonesian
citizenship. But there are still 914,111 who are PRC citizens, 1,907
are Taiwan nationals and 122,013 are stateless Chinese. Again, in
Malaysia there are in total 3.6 million Chinese and among them 220,000
are stateless.

All the ASEAN countries, except Singapore, had an economically
strong Chinese minority. Hence the local governments had taken up the

9. The term 'Stateless' is used to refer to those Chinese who do not
want to be considered either as the PRC citizens or Taiwan. Quoted
from Leo Suryadivata, "The Chinese Minority and Sino-Indonesian
Diplomatic Normalization", Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, March


12. In Thailand they constitute 12 percent, in Malaysia 36 percent, in
Indonesia 3 percent, and in the Philippines 1.25 percent of the total
population. In Singapore, the Chinese constitute 76 percent of the
total population.
measures to enable the stateless and overseas Chinese to become local citizens.

Against this background, the five Southeast Asian countries formed ASEAN in 1967. If we would go through the Bangkok Declaration of August 1967, it seems certain that management of regional affairs in coordinate manner was certainly the basic objective of the founders of ASEAN. It read the aims of the Association as follows: "To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community - Southeast Asian Nations." As we have discussed before, the ASEAN members discovered some common grounds to come closer and among them, the economic cause was the most important. But it is to be pointed out here that as it developed in 1960s and 1970s, it did not take the shape of an integrated economic community in the line of the European Economic Community (ECC). The states forming the ASEAN retained their respective sovereignty and it

13. The President of the Philippines announced the policy of his government of Filipinization of nearly 1 million overseas Chinese in 1972. In 1972, President Suharto of Indonesia issued two Presidential Decrees on Indonesian citizenship to enable stateless and alien Chinese to become Indonesian citizens. These attempts proved successful and at present majority of them have integrated in the local indigenous societies. The above discussion on the Chinese minority is based on:


seemed that none of the states ever desired to surrender a part of its sovereignty to any regional authority which might transcend the national boundaries. On the contrary, the governments of ASEAN countries seemed to view the regional cooperation as a means to further strengthening their respective national governments. It is therefore, no wonder that the participating governments in the ASEAN, developed a practice of mutual consultation rather than submission to any directive issued by any central regional authority. It should also be pointed out that the susceptibility of the ASEAN governments on the preservation of their national sovereignty, forestalled the possibility of cooperation on political issues in the initial years of the ASEAN. In 1967, when ASEAN was formed, Indochina war was on, and all the three big powers - the USA, the USSR and the PRC were active in the region. Therefore the Bangkok Declaration of ASEAN countries stated in 1967 that "the countries of Southeast Asia have a primary responsibility for ... ensuring their peaceful and progressive national development and that they are determined to ensure their stability and security from external interference". In their annual ministerial meetings during this period, the ASEAN countries talked about general peace and security, but the US role in Indochina was not criticized specifically. It could be concluded that inspite of the declared aims during the period from 1967-71, we find ASEAN developing in a very slow pace and also lacking the qualities of a coherent regional body.

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15. Ibid.
Big Powers' Politics in Southeast Asia and its Impact on ASEAN: 1967-71

As it has been discussed in the previous chapter, the big power involvement increased in Southeast Asia during the late sixties. In 1967-68 Indochina war was intensified and the US military presence increased in the region, which in turn, encouraged the Soviet Union to enhance her naval and economic involvement in this part of Asia. The PRC also approached the region after her isolation during the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, Sino-Soviet border clash in March 1969 near the Ussuri River, and the 9th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in April 1969, increased the rivalry between the two communist state in Southeast Asia. Though Britain declared her probable withdrawal from Southeast Asia by 1971, during the late sixties, her position in the region could not be ignored. Thus in the late sixties the Southeast Asian region saw an increased involvement of all the big powers. But a trend of general detente began to develop among the great powers in the early 1970s and the big power relationship changed in Southeast Asia.

Since 1970, the Nixon government changed its policy of 'opposing' and 'surrounding' the People's Republic of China. To arrange Nixon's future visit to the PRC, Henry Kissinger, the chief foreign policy advisor of Nixon Government, secretly visited Peking in July 1971. The US veto against the PRC's admission to the UN was removed in October 1971 and the PRC replaced Taiwan in the Security Council. Nixon's forthcoming trip to the PRC was also announced. This changed US policy was bound to affect inter-state relations between the Southeast Asian countries and their relations with the big powers. It was feared by
the ASEAN countries that this new turn in the US policy would give the PRC a free hand in Southeast Asia. This fear was confirmed when in an interview with the Columbia Broadcasting System, Nixon said that during his proposed visit to Peking he would discuss the future roles of the USA and the PRC in Southeast Asia.

Simultaneously attempts were also made to normalise USA's relations with the USSR. By the beginning of seventies it became clear that they would soon reach an agreement on the limitation of strategic arms. Not withstanding US trade embargo with the USSR, the trade relations between the two countries also improved during the early 1970s. The Soviet imports from the USA, including Puerto Rico, were US $114,556 thousand in 1970, in 1971 it reached to $143,556 thousand.

Since 1970, Japan also became an important Asian power. It joined the Jakarta Conference in May 1970, which was convened by Indonesia for the security of Cambodia. It approached Southeast Asia with its advanced technology and strong economy. Its exports to Southeast Asia were US $2,381 million in 1969 but in 1970 it rose to US $3,012 million. Hence, one could not rule out the possibility of Japan being a prominent power in the region. In February 1970 Japan became the fourth nation to put its satellite into orbit. It attempted to normalise its relations with the USSR and the PRC. It signed an

16. Quoted by V. Kudrayatsev, Izvestia, 7 January, 1972.
18. It was the first time after the Second World War that Japan met with most of the Asian nations and showed interest in politics and security of Southeast Asia. Before this it had shown interest only in economic activities, as for example, its initiative in the opening of the Ministerial Conference for Economic Development in Southeast Asian in April, 1966.
agreement with the USSR and agreed to invest in Siberia. Its imports from the PRC were worth $253838 thousand in 1970 and $321445 thousand in 1971. Its exports were greater than imports. It exported to the PRC goods valuing $568924 thousand in 1970, and $57736 thousand in 1971.

These trends in big power relations reflected their changed view of strategic issues in this region. It became clear that the communist and non-communist powers in the region were trying to avoid direct confrontation among themselves, and if necessary, they would not hesitate to override the interests of small powers.

By the end of 1971, it became clear to the ASEAN members that the Vietnam war would end soon and the communist government of North Vietnam would have a free hand in South Vietnam. This aroused a sense of fear among them. In the absence of active US presence in the region, the ASEAN members, particularly Thailand, feared that the communist victory in Vietnam might encourage insurgents in the ASEAN countries. In fact, the Philippines and Thailand provided their bases to America for launching attack on Vietnam. During the Indochina war, Thailand sent a civic action group and the Philippines sent combat troops to assist anti-communists in Vietnam. Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia also supported US policy in Indochina.

Moreover, a sense of insecurity developed also among Malaysia and Singapore due to the British decision to leave the region. As ASEAN


21. In February and May, 1972, when the President Nixon visited the PRC and the USSR respectively, the Indochina war was going on in full swing. But none of the Communist countries strained her bilateral relations with the US or cancelled the visit of President Nixon.
was not a military organization, both these countries felt insecure. In November 1971, they signed a Five Power Defence Arrangement with Australia, New Zealand and Britain.

Thus the big powers and the regional states in Southeast Asia passed through a process of alignment and re-alignment during the period from 1967-71.

The above discussion of socio-political conditions in Southeast Asia during 1967-71 have made clear a few points. First, the five Southeast Asian countries which formed ASEAN in 1967, were suffering from internal insurgency problems and feared the increasing influence of communists in the region. They were facing several religious and ethnic unrest within their own countries. They had mutual border conflicts, hence conflicting national interests. But inspite of these differences, they had shown a keen urge for cooperation. Second, the ASEAN members were aware of the international developments; hence they preferred ASEAN to be a non-military organization because a military pact like SEATO or CENTO seem to arouse tensions in the region, while ASEAN members wanted peace in Southeast Asia. Third, while forming a regional organization, the ASEAN members did not surrender their national sovereignty to any extra-national authority. Hence they gave emphasis in unanimity of the opinion. The issues which lack unanimity of opinion, were dropped out of the sphere of the organization. This resulted in the slow development of the organization. Furthermore, the member countries also reserved their right to differ according to their national interests. Hence, the differences of opinion could be marked out among the members on different international and regional
issues. We shall now turn to Soviet policy and posture during the period under review.

Soviet Views On The Early Phase Of ASEAN

Earlier we have occasions to point out that Southeast as a region was too far from the Soviet Union to attract its attention and involvement; so much so, that it was only during the war in 1941 that it established diplomatic relations with Thailand and later with Indonesia in 1950. The reasons for Soviet lack of contact with Southeast Asia are not far to seek. First of all, there was overpowering presence of the three major Western powers, viz. the US, Britain and France in the region after second world war; secondly, there was a wide-spread belief among the then Soviet leadership that the region lies in the sphere of activities of communist China; and finally, the sheer lack of economic resources and political will to play a distinct role in the region against every odds mentioned above. However, two countries of the region may be treated as an exception viz., Indonesia and Indochina, precisely because of soviet traditional interest in national liberation movement in these two countries. But the formation of the ASEAN also coincided with challenges to this traditional area of Soviet interest in these two countries of Southeast Asia. After the 1965 coup in Indonesia, Soviet-Indonesian relations totally backfired and the new Indonesian leadership became vocally anti-Soviet and anti-communist. Likewise, the war in Indochina and increasing US involvement in the war further aggravated the problem for the Soviet Union in the region. It may also be argued that the very formation of ASEAN in 1967 posed a challenge for a possible Soviet role in Southeast Asia.
We may however note from our discussion in the earlier chapters that the Soviet Union was always a keen supporter for regional cooperation among the states of different socio-economic systems. For instance, the resolution of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU stated, "International trade and the development of cultural ties must play a significant role in extending the basis of cooperation among countries." Again, a Soviet author also admitted that "The Soviet Union utilised economic contacts principally as an important lever for strengthening peaceful relations and establishing the desired confidence between states with different social systems". In other words the scenario for the beginning of Soviet policy towards ASEAN appeared to be marked by two contradictory trends. On the one hand, the actual reality of Southeast Asia during the second half of the sixties was totally non-conducive for the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the Soviet policy framework has traditionally emphasised support and encouragement to regional economic cooperation structured or otherwise.

It is therefore logical for us to took at the beginning of Soviet policy at various levels - the one is a general view of ASEAN as an structural organization of cooperation among Southeast Asian states; the second is bilateral relations with the ASEAN members; the third is Soviet reaction and responses to the various issues and proposals that eminated from ASEAN or a group of member states for adoption by ASEAN during the period under review. Finally, we have to


co-relate to these three in order to focus the attention on the emerging contour of Soviet policy towards ASEAN during 1967-71.

We must begin our discussion here by bringing into focus early Soviet reaction during the formation of ASEAN.

The preceding pages have discussed the background and formation of ASEAN in 1967. The Bangkok Declaration of August 1967 declared the emergence of this new organization for regional cooperation. It is to be noted here that in the beginning Soviet Union showed a lack of interest in this organization. But after some time, when she expressed her reaction, she could not cast a positive view of it because all its members, except Indonesia, had security and military agreements with either the US or the UK. Naturally, the Soviet Union could not expect such a group to be conducive to the Soviet concept of organization of regional cooperation. The background of formation of ASEAN was discussed in details in Soviet writings. According to a Soviet author, "with the creation of ASEAN, the imperialists calculated on forming a new potential, anti-communist and military Asian organization, where the interests of the reactionary forces in Southeast Asian countries coincided with common imperialist strategies in Asian continent..." It was further said that in its early stage the ASEAN subordinated its interest to the imperialism. Its policy was "neither synonymous nor growing". According to him, during the period from 1967-72, it did not emerge as an independent and important

24. See for details, V.V.Somoilenko, ASEAN Politika i Economika, Nauka, Moscow, 1982, Ch.I.


26. Ibid.
regional organization. He wrote that "practically, ASEAN activities in international arena during the years from 1967 to 1972 give an impression of its West oriented, isolated policy, followed by its members states..." Hence the Soviet criticism was obvious.

The Soviet authors thoroughly went through the political and economic conditions in Southeast Asia at the time of formation of ASEAN. According to the Soviet view, though the main purpose of the organization "appeared to be establishment of internal stability and defence, ASEAN was formed on anti-communist and mainly on anti-China base." Another Soviet commentator also stated, "This body emerged as an organization within which its members sought to pool efforts and evolve a united policy of resisting Chinese expansionism". Thus the Soviet Union viewed this organization as an anti-communist and anti-China organization which was given moral support by the USA.

During the early years of Brezhnev's leadership, the Soviet Union reviewed its policy towards the Southeast Asian countries and showed critical interest in the cooperative organizations of Asia. Trade relations were established with the countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Relations with Indonesia were revived. There were some international, national and regional factors which led to this change in Soviet attitude towards the countries of Southeast Asia.

27. Ibid. p.250


The Soviet leadership realised that their negligence shown to the developments of the countries in Southeast Asia might turn into benefits for their opponents - the US and the PRC. Hence, to limit the areas of assured influence of the US and to some extent China, it was necessary for the Soviet Union to adopt positive and active view of the developments in Southeast Asian countries and to interact with them. Moreover, Southeast Asia's proximity to areas of strategic offensive interest and its contiguity with China and Vietnam was realised by the Soviet leadership. Therefore, they reviewed their interest particularly in this region.

In 1967-68, the Soviet Union acquired the status of super power. She became an important naval power and her strategic presence in the Indian Ocean and Pacific region could not be ignored. The expanding naval capability of the Soviet Union and her technological and military achievements in this sphere led her establish cordial relations with the countries of this region. With her increasing interest in Southeast Asia, her view of the regional organization for cooperation in the region also began to change.

In the late sixties changes also took place in Southeast Asian countries. Some of them started adopting neutral and non-aligned posture. They tried for greater unity among themselves and also established economic relations with the socialist countries. The beginning of the economic relations between the socialist countries and the Southeast Asian countries gradually began to lead the better understanding between them.
Bilateral Relations Between the Soviet Union and the ASEAN States

During the late sixties and the early seventies, the Soviet Union began to evince a keen interest in different regions, including Southeast Asia. As an initial step in ASEAN region, she took up the policy of establishing bilateral economic and cultural relations, with the member countries. The following pages will discuss Soviet policy towards the five ASEAN members individually and analyse how it had moulded Soviet policy towards the ASEAN organization.

SINGAPORE

Singapore has the republican form of government. There are two significant political parties - the People's Action Party (PAP) and the Barisan Socialist. But PAP has been in power since Singapore established its separate existence in 1965. PAP followed a left-oriented policy. But it is anti-communist. It has adopted socialist principles to the requirement of her economy. Singapore enjoys price stability and economic growth. The PAP government has successfully implemented her industrialization programme. It has built up and shaped a bureaucracy to mobilize the economic resources. It has a large number of industrial establishment ranging from simple industries as motor vehicle assembly, bicycle manufacturing, to more sophisticated establishments like steel and iron works to ship building and electronics. Singapore's economy is the strongest of the ASEAN countries and it is not based on agriculture.

It is a free port city and commercial centre for the collection and distribution of trade products. It is also a refueling and
repairing centre for ships. Singapore was the first ASEAN country to establish economic relation with the USSR.

Strategic location of Singapore and its foreign policy orientation in the late sixties could not avoid Soviet attention. Soviet authors stated that "the public at large and the government know very well that it is in the interest of Singapore, particularly in view of its geographic location, to promote peaceful coexistence and expand equal mutually advantageous ties with all countries, irrespective of their social system." The Soviet expert on Southeast Asian countries, G.I. Chufrin studied the history of Singapore. He concentrated his attention on economic history and the problems of Singapore's economic and political development in sixties. In 1968, a Soviet group visited Singapore and Professor V. Aboltin, a member of this group, noted rapid development of national industry and light industry. He also marked that 20 Israeli military instructors had been invited to train Singapore's army. A Soviet author noted Singapore government's extensive interference in the process of economic development. It was further stated that Singapore's economy "has not experienced the difficulties caused by the archaic agricultural production, typical of other countries in the sub-region". The Soviet Union also praised Singapore government's "policy in national question" and "its peaceful foreign policy", as it had influenced "situation in Singapore".

The Soviet Union signed the first trade agreement with Singapore in April 1966 and it led to the mutual establishment of trade missions. In 1969, Singapore and the USSR established direct air links. The Soviet Union imported 15,000 tons of coconut oil in 1968-70. This was the largest single import from Singapore. It also imported Singapore-made foot-wear and dresses. A Singaporean firm, Marweld Engineers, arranged an exhibition of Soviet industrial equipments in 1971. The firm Marweld Engineers alone bought from "Stankoimport" about 70,000 dollar worth of metal-cutting machines.

A Singapore-Soviet shipping company was set up in 1971. Singapore also agreed to the shipping of Singapore goods on Soviet vessels to Europe. A branch of Narodny Bank of Moscow was also opened in Singapore in 1971. It was meant to deal with financing trade operations of the USSR and other socialist countries with Southeast Asia. The USSR's exports to Singapore include machine-tools, ball-bearings, pig-iron, window glass, paper and textile. In 1971 she supplied "over 100 metal cutting machines, more than 300,000 bearings and mobile compressor substations. The Soviet Union has also ship-repairing, decking and refuelling facilities in Singapore. More than 500 ships annually call at the port of Singapore. This has ensured close economic relations between the two. Singapore's trade with the Soviet Union in 1971 exceeded 8 million rubles.

36. "Stankoimport" is a Soviet foreign trade organisation.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
The Singapore government is however very cautious and has not allowed their economic relations to influence political relations. Singapore did not support Soviet proposal of Asian collective security in 1969. Rather, Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew gave hints of favouring balanced presence of all the big powers.

The Soviet leaders noticed the foreign policy aims of Singapore. Being a free port-city, she could not lean at the side of a particular group. Therefore, the Soviet Union maintained non-economic relations too. Soviet media had a good base in Singapore during early seventies. The Tass, Novosti News Agencies, Pravda and Moscow Radio and Television maintain their staff in Singapore. There were twenty Soviet students studying Mandarin in Nanyang University. There was a lecturer of Russian at the University of Singapore. Thus the Soviet-Singapore contacts increased during late sixties and early seventies, and this in turn gave the Soviet Union a chance to assess Singapore's role in changing international conditions of the region and in the ASEAN.

THAILAND

Thailand is the only country in the region which has no colonial past. It is a Buddhist kingdom. In fact, the government is an oligarchy mostly of senior military officers. In 1968, a new constitution was introduced. It provides for a national assembly with two houses - Senate and a House of Representatives. Government administration in Thailand is highly centralised and bureaucratic. In the administration army, navy, air force and police officers play the important role. Only a few civilians are the members of Senate. United Thai People's Party is ruling party.
Thailand has peasant economy. Eighty five percent of Thailand's population is rural. Nearly 66 percent of the export income is from rice. Recently the government has changed her policy. Foreign investors are encouraged to establish industries in Thailand. Equipments and the materials, which are needed for establishment of industries, are exempted from import duty. Thai economy is in need of credits. Therefore, the government gave emphasis on trade with the outside powers. But there is lack of trained staff for administration of economy.

The Soviet authors paid enough attention to the socio-political development in Thailand. They studies the typological peculiarities of the state and society at the end of 19th century, the directions of their evolution in modern times and their present state.

Thailand joined SEATO in 1954 and gradually became a partner of US military plans in Southeast Asia. She provided her air and naval base to the US which were freely used by the latter during Indochina War. The Soviet authors referred to American Press reporting that "the Pentagon had spent nearly 500 million dollars building its six bases in Thailand". Therefore, the Soviet Union could not favourably look upon Thai foreign policy or its role in the ASEAN. It noted increasing number of US armed forces in Thailand which was more than 40,000. The Soviet Union also marked that on Washington's demand "6,000 Thai soldiers of the Black Panthers division were sent to South Vietnam to...


44. Ibid.
replace US 9th Infantry Division". Moreover, Soviet leadership knew that "artillery battalions secretly moved into Laos from Thailand" and were "fighting there at the side of the reactionary forces". Hence the Soviet Union always feared that Thailand might try hard to turn the ASEAN into a military bloc. But till 1970, when ASEAN did not take shape of a military pact, the Soviet Union established economic relations with Thailand.

The Soviet Union turned its attention to increase trade with Thailand in 1970. In 1969 the Moscow Radio broadcast in Thai a list of goods which could be exchanged between Thailand and the Soviet Union. It announced that the USSR was interested in "supplying Thailand with various kinds of machinery, electrical equipment, glass, iron, textiles, food and medicine. Thailand could increase its exports of rubber, rice, maize, timber and ready-made commodities such as shirts and shoes in which the West has shown no interest". This list of commodities showed the pattern and aim of Soviet trade in this region. She helped these countries in their plans for modernisation of economy and imported their primary commodities, which might encourage them to increase their trade relations with the USSR and facilitate the Soviet presence in the region.

In December 1970 Thailand and the USSR signed a trade agreement on the basis of reciprocal benefits. The Soviet Union agreed to import Thai rubber and tin, and export machineries. But the coup of 1971 in Thailand diminished the hope of close relations between them.

45. Ibid, p.28.

The Thai government did not show her eagerness to establish cultural relations with the Soviet Union. Therefore, till early 1970s no cultural relations could be established with Thailand. Only a draft air agreement was signed between them in 1971 and the air routes were expanded to Malaysia and Singapore.

Thus the Soviet Union maintained economic relation and tried for cultural relations with Thailand inspite of latter's pro-US policy and involvement in Indochina war in favour of the South Vietnam government. It was hoped that with the changed international conditions, Thailand might decrease her dependence on the US and the Soviet Union might get a foothold in the country. In the later years, Soviet contact with Thailand gave the USSR an opportunity to closely view Thailand's foreign policy and her role in the ASEAN.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a federal state with a constitutional monarchy. The federal constitution of Malaysia is based on British constitution. The Parliament of Malaysia consists of a Senate and a House of Representatives. The ruling party in Malaysia is the Alliance party which is a combination of three communal parties - United Malay National Organization, Malayan Chinese Association and Malayan Indian Congress. The Alliance Party has been in power in Malaysia since 1955. There is absence of a controlling opposition.

Malaysia is a rubber and tin producing country. The Malaysian economy is heavily dependent on world prices of rubber and tin which

47. Straits Times, (Singapore), 23 September, 1975.
are very unstable. This has led to instability in national economy. The Malaysian government encourages foreign investment in the country. The Soviet Union noted that "63 percent of capital investments" of the five year development programme (1966-70) of Malaysia "are reckoned as coming from private sources including investors in Great Britain, the US, Japan, Belgium, Australia and Canada." But in seventies the Soviet Union commented that "At the same time, it is clear from press and official statement that Malaysia would like to end a situation in which overseas investors continue to regard the country as a source of rich profits and high quality raw materials in supply".

Soviet authors studied the problems of social developments in Malaysia. They marked the problem presented by the existing "relations between the three biggest national groups - the Malays, Chinese and Indians." It was also noted that "National prejudices are practically deep rooted in the villages".

Malaysia was in short of technicians and engineers. Therefore "specialists are invited from capitalist countries". The Soviet Union marked it and criticised the policy. The Soviet government also criticised stationing of British, Australian and New Zealand troops in Malaysia. But the Soviet Union marked the non-aligned policy of Malaysia and its efforts to neutralize the Southeast Asia. A "Soviet

50. Rustam Sevortyan, op.cit, p.29.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. International Affairs, No.8, 1971, p.87.
author opined: "Malaysia's economic needs and its desire to play an active role in world politics and help to maintain peace in Asia are the objective factors underlying Soviet-Malaysia cooperation".

The government of Malaysia was anti-communist in its attitude from the very beginning. But gradually it assumed a non-aligned posture in its foreign policy. Its leaders invited external investment both from East and West and preferred their participation in management. Following the establishment of Soviet economic relations with Malaysia in 1967, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Trade, Mr.N.S.Patolichev visited Kuala Lumpur in 1969 and arranged an exhibition of Soviet industrial and trade goods. The Soviet Union exhibited various items ranging from excavators to models of Russia's latest aircrafts. This resulted in several agreements being signed between the Soviet Union and Malaysia.

The Soviet trade representative in Kuala Lumpur, B.I.Kokrev went to East Malaysia for discussion with the private sector. Due to the imposition of taxes on 21 items in 1969 by the central government, East Malaysia was in need of cheaper sources of goods. Therefore the Soviet Union tried to establish direct trade relations with Sarawak. It was also in accordance with the trade agreement of 1967. The Soviet Union offered spare parts of Soviet machinery and equipments for building pumps, diesel engines, generators and excavators at a lower cost.

The Soviet Union mainly imported tin and rubber from Malaysia. It is said that "Soviet Union bags almost one-fifth" of Malaysian

54. A.Yuriev, op.cit, p.25.
rubber. In 1971 USSR purchased 230,000 tons of Malaysian rubber which accounted for a quarter of Malaysia's export.

Soviet journalists, scientists and writers visited Malaysia to develop cultural relations between the two countries. In 1969, when a trade exhibition of Soviet goods was arranged in Kuala Lampur, nearly 50 decorators, painters and technicians visited that city.

The Soviet Union thus maintained economic and cultural relations with Malaysia inspite of knowing her pro-West foreign policy orientation, her anti-communist internal policy and her weak agrarian economy. It was perhaps hoped by the Soviet leaders that as Malaysia claimed to be a non-aligned country, it would resist any attempt to transform ASEAN into a military bloc.

**INDONESIA**

The first constitution of Indonesia was prepared in August 1945. The constitution provided for substantial powers in the hands of President and the members of first Parliament were appointed by him. In 1957, President Sukarno introduced the so called 'guided democracy' and with the support of the army, he ran the administration. During this period the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) and the national army, both became very powerful. In 1965, a coup was engineered to reduce the power of the army but the coup failed and the PKI was totally suppressed by the army. Sukarno was removed from power and


General Suharto, the Commander-in-Chief of the army, became the President.

Suharto's government is a kind of benevolant dictatorship. The country is ruled by military officers and a few civilians under the guidance of the President.

Economally Indonesia was suffering from inflation. Hence, to earn foreign exchange, Suharto gave emphasis on export of petroleum. Import of consumer goods was restricted and in 1969 a Five-Year Plan was introduced with more stress on agriculture, as Indonesian economy is basically agrarian. The government sought and received aid from the West and it encouraged the foreign powers to invest in Indonesia.

As we have pointed out earlier in the chapter, Soviet Union had diplomatic relations with Indonesia since 1950. She had supported Indonesia's cause in the UN against the Dutch colonialists. Due to Indonesia's non-aligned and neutral posture in fifties, the Soviet-Indonesian relations became cordial. In 1956 and 1960 the Soviet Union concluded general agreements with the Republic of Indonesia on economic and technical cooperation. Aid was also provided for building industrial projects. During the period, 1956-65, the Soviet economic and military aid to Indonesia amounted to 1 billion dollar. But, due to the military coup in Indonesia in 1965, the conditions changed. Indonesia's relations with the Soviet Union got strained. Hence, during the period from 1967 to 1971 the Soviet Union criticised the

internal policy of Indonesia. Though Soviet media favoured her neutral posture during this period, her policy of taking western aid was not favourably looked upon. The Soviet media took note that Indonesia was "under debt of 2.5 bn dollars" and could not even pay the interest. It was also noted that in 1968 Indonesia received loan of 325 mn dollars from Japan and the US. The Soviet Union criticised the policy of the western countries, who were trying to capture Indonesian market. It was said that as the "Indonesian government has thrown the country's door open to western banks and concerns, West German capital is out to seize strong positions in that country".

Politically the Soviet Union opposed Indonesian policy of "inhuman persecution of Indonesian patriots" since 1965. The Central Committee of CPSU issued a statement in 1968 and stated that "The Central Committee of the CPSU and the Soviet public have repeatedly and resolutely demanded an end to the bloody reprisals against the communists and other patriots of Indonesia." Later in seventies, the Soviet Union send medical aid to the Indonesian prisoners through Red Cross. Inspite of these criticisms of the internal policies of the Indonesian government, the Soviet media appreciated Indonesian policy of non-alignment and her role in ASEAN. It was stated, "hitherto, despite the screws put on her by Washington and its emissaries in Asia, Indonesia has refused to side with the US in Vietnam. Djakarta

59. Ibid.
60. New Times, No.16, 1969, p.27.
has also resisted the transformation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which it joined last year, into a military bloc.

This Soviet assessment of internal and external policy of Indonesia shows, that inspite of their mutual differences, it was eager to re-establish relations with Indonesia. As the resumption of political relations in the beginning were not possible due to their antagonistic policies, the Soviet Union gave emphasis on establishment of economic and cultural relations.

After 1965, the Indonesian government became staunchly anti-communist, and established close economic relations with the West. But in 1970, it again approached the socialist countries except the *I.A.C* for aid and trade relations.

In 1970 the Soviet Union signed an agreement with Indonesia rescheduling debts totalling US$ 750 million payable over a period of thirty years. She decided to increase rubber purchase and trade in general with Indonesia. She offered to sell spare parts for Indonesian naval vessels and air force planes on 'easy terms'. Indonesia and the USSR exchanged a list of goods they were ready to sell. The Soviet Union offered to sell fertilizer, machinery and textile manufacturing equipments. The Indonesian list included rubber, coffee, pepper and handicraft products. Indonesia was an importer of large quantity of Soviet fertilizer.

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63. I.Antonov, *op.cit*, p.5.


In 1970 the Soviet Union resumed its cultural activities in Indonesia. After 1965 it became clear to the Soviet Union that the Indonesian government would not tolerate Soviet political activities within its borders. Therefore the Soviet Union gave more importance to cultural and humanitarian activities. Vasily Zaichikov, the Deputy head of the Russian Press Bureau 'Novosti' received in 1970 a team of Indonesian journalists in Moscow. The members of the team were the editors-in-chief of Kampas, Pedoman, Sulah Berita, and Merdeka. Through this visit Indonesian journalists got an opportunity to observe activities of the Russian Press and the Russian way of life. They also visited some of the important cities of the Soviet Union, such as, Tashkent and Leningrad.

The mutual exchanges of the economic and cultural teams gradually restored the confidence of each other and both the countries continued their bilateral relations. Indeed, this relation helped them to understand each other's foreign policy aims and their role in different parts of the world. The Soviet Union could assess that Indonesia was not going to join the Western camp. Hence, it was understood that its membership in ASEAN was an important factor in checking organization's shift further to Western camp.

PHILIPPINES

The constitution of the Philippines was drafted in 1935, when she was not yet an independent country. After her independence in 1946 the same constitution was adopted. The constitution of 1935 drew much from the US constitution. The 1935 constitution provides for an executive,
a legislative and a judiciary. The President has been given wide personal powers. He can initiate and veto. Ferdinand Marcos was the President of the country during this period and he ruled with the help of army. There were mainly two parties – Nacionalista Party and Liberal Party. But basically there is no difference between them.

The Philippines is an agrarian country, with 60 percent of its economy in agricultural sector. She exports various raw or semi-finished items to earn foreign exchange. These are sugar, coconut products and forest products. She has developed some secondary industries such as, local assembly of cars, lorries, radios, refrigerators and air conditioners. Her imports consist of hydrocarbon fuels, industrial plant, machines, automative and aircraft items. The Philippines had her economic relations mainly with the West and Japan. Moreover she had a marked military alliance relationship with the USA, in particular.

The Soviet Union closely observed the economic and political developments in the Philippines during the period from 1967-71. The Soviet authors did not hesitate to comment in 1971 that "the Philippines have not been able to solve a single one of its cardinal 66 problems". N.Kapchenko visited the Philippines as a Soviet tourist. He discussed social, political and economic conditions in the Philippines. The Philippines was the member of SEATO and her air and naval bases were freely used by the USA against Vietnam. This was not liked by the Soviet Union. A Soviet commentator stated "As a result of the prices set by American monopolies, the Philippines had a large

foreign trade deficit last year. The exchange rate of the Peso became shaky". He further said, "the deficit continued to swell in the first six months of the current year, reaching nearly 100 mn dollars. The economic growth rate dropped last year and looks like continuing to drop".

Another Soviet author condemned the Philippine government's policy towards political prisoner who struggled against imperialist and colonial oppression. He also referred to the forces which were "pressing for a thorough revision of the Laurel-Langley trade agreement with the United States, for the removal of American military bases, for the non involvement of the Philippines in the imperialist war in Vietnam and for diplomatic, trade and cultural relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries". Thus the Soviet Union marked "the growing wave of anti-American demonstrations in the Philippines".

The Soviet scholars criticised Philippines' role in the ASEAN as the Philippines had suggested "the inclusion, above all, of south Korea and Taiwan" in the ASEAN and wanted "ASEAN to be enlarged by bringing the US puppets rather than neutralist countries. Inspite of these criticisms the Soviet authors marked that "the question of relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries has been

69. Ibid.
70. N.Kapchenko, op.cit, p.87.
71. N.Volzhin, "The Options Before Indonesia", International Affairs, No.12, 1971, p.68.
widely discussed in the Philippines of late and specially during 1970. It was also noticed that a "Bill to legalise the communist party" in the Philippines "has been introduced in the Congress". These positive developments in the Philippines encouraged Soviet Union to establish economic relations with the former.

Official contacts between the Philippines and the Soviet Union began when Senate leader, Gil Ruyat was invited to visit the Soviet Union in 1971. The Soviet Union established economic relations with the Philippines though it was a member of SEATO. The trade relations between the two countries however, developed slowly. The Soviet Union was one of the major importers of copra from the Philippines but it had no direct trade relations with the Philippines. The Philippines approached some East European countries, as Yugoslavia, Rumania and Czechoslovakia, in 1968 for trade.

Although no cultural contact was established between the Philippines and the Soviet Union during the period from 1967 to 1971 their economic relations, insignificant as they were by the beginning of the seventies, eventually paved the way for the future cultural contacts between them.

Thus, by the early seventies, the Soviet Union gradually tried to come closer to the ASEAN members and established bilateral relations separately with them. The volume of bilateral trade between the Soviet Union and the five ASEAN members during 1967-71 could be assessed from

72. N.Kapchenko, op.cit, p.87-88.

73. Ibid.
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Data of Soviet-Philippines trade is not available. (N.A.)
Table 1, which shows Soviet export to and import from the five ASEAN countries individually. It also summed up the total volume of trade in every year. The data, firstly, shows the imbalance trade relations between the USSR and the ASEAN countries. Her imports exceeded her exports to the ASEAN countries. Secondly, the volume of trade between them did not show the constant growth. It vary from year to year. Thirdly, the data reflects that Malaysia was the most important trade partner of the USSR in ASEAN region and Thailand was the minor partner. fourthly, Singapore was the major importer of the USSR in ASEAN area. Fifthly, the Philippines did not have any direct trade relations with the Soviet Union till 1971.

It was found that Inspite of the neo-colonial policy of the US and the West, the Southeast Asian countries were gradually becoming conscious of their own national and regional interests. The political commentator of Izvestia, V.Matveyev, stated that "The forces standing for national sovereignty and independence are maturing and developing in the difficult and complicated situation now prevailing in Southeast Asia. These forces have to be reckoned with by those who covet the wealth of others." Therefore, the Soviet Union decided to support the new trends in the countries of Southeast Asia. She tried to revive her relations with countries of the region which later helped her to assess the character of ASEAN as a viable regional organization of cooperation, and not a forum under US patronage.

74. V.Matveyev, Izvestia, 22 May, 1970.
During the early stage of ASEAN's formation, the Soviet Union mainly criticized the organization due to its members' involvement in Indochina war. Moreover, the Soviet Union could not support the decision of nationalization of Straits of Malacca, by some of the ASEAN members. Again, she criticized the proposal of Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) put forward by the five ASEAN members because, in Soviet view, with the foreign base in their territory, the ASEAN member could not enjoy freedom or remain neutral. Hence, we shall take up important issues, like ASEAN's role in Indochina war, proposal for nationalization of Malacca Straits and ASEAN initiative for ZOPFAN.

INDOCHINA WAR

During the late sixties and early seventies, escalation of Indochina war was another important political development of Southeast Asian region which affected both regional states and outside powers involved in this part of Asia.

In fact the Geneva Conference of 1954 brought an end to the first Indochina war. In this Conference, the Soviet Union and the PRC jointly supported the proposal of Democratic Republic of Vietnam for the independence of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, withdrawal of foreign troops from these territories, unification of Vietnam and formation of national government in these states without foreign interference. The Geneva Conference also recognised their neutrality and it was declared that free election would be held in these countries in 1955.

Geneva Accord of 1962 also confirmed their neutrality. But the political conditions in Southeast Asia deteriorated in the late sixties. Though the Paris talks for the settlement of Vietnam started in May 1968, in 1970 the war was intensified and it spread to Cambodia. When the war extended to Cambodia, it became a cause of anxiety for the ASEAN members. A conference of Asian powers on Cambodia held in Jakarta in May 1970 and the ASEAN countries addressed themselves to Indochina question in the Conference.

As it has been stated before, the ASEAN countries directly or indirectly supported US policy in Indochina. Thai and Philippine military units operated in South Vietnam. Thai military fought against the communists in Laos. After 1965 coup, Indonesia's relations with the USSR and the PRC strained and Indonesia followed anti-communist domestic policy. Communist parties were banned in all the ASEAN countries and the ASEAN countries suspect the motive of the Indochina countries in Southeast Asia. In 1967, the Political Programme of National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam decided to help all the national liberation movements of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Though this programme also supported the policy of establishing diplomatic relations with the countries having different socio-political systems., it made the ASEAN countries more cautious. Therefore, a relation of mutual suspicion prevailed between the two groups of countries in Southeast Asia. The Soviet and Chinese involvement in Indochina further embittered the relations between them.

Soviet View of ASEAN's Role in Indo-China War

In Indo-China war, the Soviet Union took the side of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Massive military and economic aid was given by the USSR to the struggling Indochinese states. On 27 June 1968 the Soviet Foreign Minister A. Gromyko declared at the Fourth Session of the Seventh USSR Supreme Soviet that "the DRV (Democratic Republic of Vietnam-added) receives continuous and extensive aid including arms, from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. While addressing Twenty-fifth UN General Assembly on 21 October 1970, Gromyko, explained that, "In pursuance of its international duty the Soviet Union is providing and will continue to provide all necessary help to the fraternal Vietnamese people in its just and heroic struggles." 


But the Soviet Union was eager to end the war as quickly as possible. The Twenty-fourth Congress of the CPSU adopted an appeal "for Freedom and Peace to the Peoples of Indochina". The appeal stated that "the Soviet Union is deeply convinced that the proposals set

77. A. Gromyko, Lenin and the Soviet Peace Policy, (Speeches and Articles), Progress, Moscow, 1980, p.151.

78. Ibid, p.192.

79. This data is quoted from S.K. Ghosh, "Relations between North Vietnam, China and Soviet Union", India Quarterly, No.2, April-June, 1975, pp.140-41.
forth by the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam, the patriotic front of Laos and the National United Front of Cambodia offer a constructive basis for the solution of the problems of Indochina. The Soviet Union wanted the end of aggression in Southeast Asia. It believed that the withdrawal of the US from the region could bring peace in Southeast Asia. It is said that "a settlement of the Indochina problem requires, first and foremost, an end to the aggression and the practical recognition of the right of the people of Southeast Asia to decide their own destinies by themselves and without foreign interference".

The Soviet Union did not like the role played by ASEAN countries in Indochina war. It had been stated by a Soviet author that "Thailand and the Philippines actively helped the US in her Indochina policy. The US bases in these two countries were freely used in Indochina war, while Malaysia and Singapore also gave support to the US action in Indochina." About Indonesia's role in Indochina war, a Soviet author commented, "Instead of condemning the US aggression when the USA sent it troops into Cambodia, Indonesia initiated a "peace conference", whose participants did not voice, any resolute protests against Washington's aggressive action". In the annual meetings of the foreign minister of ASEAN, they talked about external interference but

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82. V.V.Samoilenko, op.cit, p.99.

83. N.Volzhin, "The Options before Indonesia", International Affairs, Moscow, No.12, 1971.
did not criticise US action in Indochina. It was due to this only that Vietnam never avail ASEAN invitation for joining ASEAN foreign ministers' annual meeting as an observer. The Soviet Union watched this and realised Vietnam's hesitation to help in broadening the ASEAN. In 1970, Indonesia called for a Conference on Cambodia in Jakarta, and the ASEAN countries discussed Indochina problem. We understand that it was not liked by Vietnam and the USSR. A Soviet author commented that from the very beginning, the government of ASEAN countries hoped that war would be decided in favour of the USA. Hence, they did not hesitate to side with the US. He further stated, "therefore the relations of ASEAN countries with DRV were extremely negative." The Soviet authors also reviewed the contemporary political condition in Indochina. According to a Soviet author, "It was a period of aggrevated military action in Indochina and instead of coming out of military strategic doctrine of creating 'great Asia-Pacific Association' and 'sphere of Asia-Pacific solidarity', two of its members participated in this war on the side of American aggressors." As we have pointed out before, the USSR viewed ASEAN as a bloc which was set up with the Western collaboration to counter the revolutionary movement of Indochina. Hence the Soviet criticism of ASEAN was obvious.

In fact, the Soviet Union was on one hand deeply involved in Indochina war, and on the other, she wanted bilateral economic and

84. 10 Years ASEAN, op.cit, p.14.
85. V.V.Samoilenko, op.cit, p.100.
86. T.I.Sulitskaya, op.cit, p.98.
87. G.B.Kolikhalova & A.I.Petrov, op.cit, p.250.
diplomatic relations with the Southeast Asian countries. But we can conclude here that ASEAN's role in Indochina did not help in smoothening the Soviet-ASEAN relation. On the other hand it aroused Soviet Union's anti-ASEAN view.

Proposal for Nationalization of Straits of Malacca and Singapore

Proposal for nationalisation of international straits like Malacca and Singapore in 1971 was to affect not only the interest of big naval powers- the US and the USSR - but also the regional powers. Hence a brief discussion of its historical development and relevance to Southeast Asia is necessary here.

Indonesia and Malaysia, the two ASEAN countries issued a statement, declaring the straits of Malacca and Singapore as a national water-way in November 1971. Singapore was also a party to the declaration though she was against the policy of nationalisation of the international waterways.

The Strait of Malacca and Strait of Singapore comprise the shortest and cheapest sea route between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. The Straits of Malacca and Singapore are between the Indonesian island of Sumatra and West Malaysia, and between the Riouw Archipelago and Singapore respectively. Together, they are like a funnel-shaped waterway. The width of the straits varies from 8.2 nautical miles in the straits of Singapore to 11.1 nautical miles at the eastern outlet. At some points its depth is only 10 fathoms.

The importance of the straits appears from the fact that in 1971 more than 40,000 vessels passed through the straits and seventy of
these tankers were more than 200,000 dead weight tons (DWT). The Straits Times of Singapore estimated in 1972 that about "50,000 ships use the Straits of Malacca annually".

There are some major problems of navigation in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. The first problem is the danger of collision among the increased number of vessels, due to the narrowness of the straits. The second problem is of grounding. These straits are a shallow waterway and to avoid danger of "squatting", the very Large Crude Carriers (BLOCS) have to reduce their speed. The Straits of Malacca and Singapore became important from navigational point of view in the late 1960s and hence, a need of nationalization was felt.

During the late 1960s the naval activities of the developed countries became intensive due to some scientific developments in those countries. A territorial sea of 3 miles could not match their scientific research and national needs. Therefore, in 1967, an item regarding the peaceful uses of sea-bed beyond the national jurisdiction was included in the agenda of the UN General Assembly. It decided that "the sea-bed and ocean floor, and the subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction ... as well as the resources of the area are the common heritage of mankind" and "shall not be subject of appropriation by any means by states or persons". It was also declared that this area "shall be open to use exclusively for


89. Straits Times, (Singapore), 14 July, 1972.
peaceful purpose by all states... without discrimination. The declaration of General Assembly in 1970, established the principle of common heritage and favoured the naval ambitions of the developed countries, who wanted to exploit and explore the sea-bed resources - renewable and non-renewable - in the high seas.

The General Assembly adopted another resolution which decided to convene a conference on law of the Sea in 1973.

These developments regarding the law of the seas were in favour of the big naval powers. They had desire and capacity to exploit and explore the high seas. But the developing countries had not strong navy and therefore they could not exploit the sea-bed beyond their national jurisdiction. Hence to safeguard their national interests, most of the developing countries increased the limit of their territorial seas from 3 miles to 12 miles. The proposal for nationalisation of Straits of Malacca and Singapore should be studied at this background.

The Strait of Malacca became an issue in late 1960s when Britain announced her impending withdrawal from "East of Suez". Furthermore, Sino-Soviet rivalry, Sino-American and Sino-Japanese detente and the growing Soviet and US naval presence in the region in the late 1960s and early 1970s led Indonesia and Malaysia to declare the Straits of Malacca and Singapore as national waters on 16 November, 1971. The


joint statement was incorporated within a tripartite statement of which Singapore was a party. It should be noted here that Singapore was against the nationalisation of the Straits. Therefore to reach a common position on the issue they consulted each other and agreements were reached on following points:

1. Safety of navigation in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore is the responsibility of coastal states concerned;
2. There was need for tripartite cooperation on the safety of navigation in the two Straits;
3. The three governments agreed that a body for cooperation (sic) to coordinate efforts for the safety of navigation in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore be established as soon as possible and that such body should be composed of only the three coastal states concerned;
4. the problems of safety of navigation and the question of internationalization of the Straits are two separate issues;
5. The governments of the Republic of Indonesia and that of Malaysia agreed that the Straits of Malacca and Singapore are not international straits, while fully recognising their use for international shipping in accordance with the principle of innocent passage. The government of Singapore takes note of the position of the Indonesia and of Malaysia on this point.
6. On the basis of this understanding the three governments approved the continuation of the hydrographic survey.

Singapore gave more emphasis on the fourth point than others as she believed that the question of navigation and pollution were

different from the "unimpeded passage of all ships of all nations through the Straits". The Foreign Minister of Singapore, Rajaratnam said that "we feel that it would be premature to settle the status of the Straits of Malacca one way or other without reaching agreement on the other one hundred and thirteen such Straits which are considered by the UN to be of international importance." According to him, "those who use it must agree to observe certain rules and regulations to ensure safety, security and avoid risks of collision in the Straits." Thus he recognised the problem of damage from pollution but did not support nationalisation of the Straits.

It was decided that the ships over 200,000 Dead Weight Ton (DWT) and upto 550,000 DWT were to be provided an alternative passage through Macassar and Lambok straits, although it was a longer route. Indonesia tried to make the route attractive and gave depot facilities to the foreign oil producers at Lambok and Tiluk Semongka. Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, rejected the concept of 'the high seas corridor' but they recognised the right of other states to 'innocent passage'. Malaysia claimed that the two countries also had the right to search the vessels passing through the straits and "object carrying arms for an unfriendly country".

94. Ibid.
95. Straits Times (Singapore), 15 March, 1972.
Apart from Indonesia and Malaysia, two other ASEAN members, namely, Thailand and the Philippines supported the sovereignty of the coastal states over the straits used for international navigation.

Singapore's views were different than that of the other ASEAN states. For its economic and political existence as an international city, it supported unimpeded passage of the ships and multiple presence of the external powers. One should note here that daily 100 ships pass through the straits, and in 1971 Singapore cleaned 18,723 vessels of over 75 net registered tonnage. It was also against the acceptance of such principles as 'innocent passage' because it might result the disturbances of the passage of commercial vessels as the term might be interpreted subjectively by an unfriendly coastal government. It supported 3 mile territorial sea limit.

The above discussion shows that all the ASEAN members were concerned about the security problems and damages from pollution in the straits. But they differed regarding proposal for the 'nationalization of straits' and policy of 'unimpeded passage' of ships. It is to be noted here that this difference of opinion did not effect their attitude towards the warships of the super powers in the region.

Soviet Stand on Nationalization of Straits of Malacca and Singapore

The Soviet Union could not take a positive stand on Indonesia and Malaysia's proposal for nationalization of straits of Malacca and

Singapore, as it was to hamper naval movement of the Soviet Union in the region.

Till 1968, the navy had not occupied a significant place in the Soviet armed forces. In 1950s and early 1960s the navy, in fact, was given the lowest priority in the Soviet military hierarchy. It is clear from the speeches of Defence Ministers R. Malinovski and A. Grechko on the annual army-navy days which fall on 22 February.

Admiral Sargei Gorshkov became Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Navy in 1956. He was a strong supporter of nuclear, missile carrying submarines. In his speeches he referred to the relative strength of the US and Soviet navies, and tried to put pressure on the Soviet leaders to allocate more resources for navy.

In addition to this internal development, international factors were partly responsible for the development of the Soviet navy. The technological developments of the US navy started in 1950s and the nuclear-powered submarines and Polaris type missiles were deployed in different seas and oceans. As a result, the USSR heartland came within the range of these missiles. This single factor was strong enough to bring about a dramatic change in the role of Soviet navy. Gorshkov stated that, "one of the reasons for the switch off the centre of gravity to naval forces is that the aggressive (sic) forces of imperialism are now represented by a bloc of maritime powers possessing powerful naval forces relying on numerous bases and occupying advantageous strategic position."


The new leadership realised the need to deter the US naval activities and therefore the quick development of Soviet navy began. In July 1969 the nine soviet ships entered the Carribean Sea and remained there for a month. Yankee - class missile submarines were deployed in the Pacific in 1970. The Soviet Union deployed Arctic, Baltic and Black Sea Fleets in Europe and Pacific Fleet in Asia. Aircover was also provided to the Soviet warships. As its Arctic coasts are ice-bound in winter, a large, modern ice-breaker was employed to keep open the ports throughout the year. They developed a "short war" strategy and had right to port facilities of many littoral states of Indian Ocean and the Pacific such as India, Iraq, South Yemen, and Somalia. To solve the base problem it placed two large buoys in international waters some 35 miles east of the Coetivy Islands just south of the Seychells.

Due to increasing Soviet naval activities in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the proposal for nationalization of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore became an important issue for the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union appeared in this region as one of the super naval power. In 1971, when the proposal for the nationalisation of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore was put forward by Indonesia and Malaysia, the Soviet Union could not support it. Straits of Malacca and Singapore are vital links between its Siberian Far Eastern parts and Vladivostock, and the Black Sea in West. These are the only sea-lanes which remain open throughout the year. Thus, it form an

important route to maintain the communication line between the East Asian and European parts of the Soviet Union. As the Soviet warships were not constructed in the Far East they were sent to the East from the West through the Indian Ocean and these straits. It also connects her three European fleets viz., the Arctic, the Baltic and the Black Sea fleets with her Pacific fleet. Moreover, in 1970s the Soviet Union developed a trade relation with the ASEAN members, particularly Malaysia. It imported Malaysian tin and rubber and the Soviet commercial fleet frequented through these straits. Again, since late 1960s she became major arms supplier to Vietnam and her ships passed through these straits to reach Vietnam. More than 500 Soviet ships annually call at the port of Singapore. This passage is of considerable potential importance in case of a conflict with China. In the event the Soviet Far East is threatened to be cut off from Central Russia, the Straits might be used as a route from the Black Sea to Vladivostock and the Siberian Far East. Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific also helped it watch naval activities of the PRC, Japan and the US.

One of the Soviet authorities stated: "in International Law, it is normally assumed that Straits which connect open seas and are of important as world sea routes, should be opened for general use. Passage of merchant vessels and warships through these Straits is not restricted since their legal regime is based on the principles of freedom of the high seas."

The Soviet Union supported freedom of navigation in the international straits at international legal forums. In the light of the developments stated above, it can be argued that the Soviet Union's national and political interests clashed on the question of recognition of nationalisation of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore by Indonesia and Malaysia. After 1965, the Soviet Union was following policy of cooperation with the established governments of this region. It was maintaining friendly relations with them and acceptance of the Indonesian and Malaysian move would certainly promote its political interest. On the other hand, as an important naval power, it could not accept the nationalisation proposal and its national interests placed it in the company of the US and Japan on the issue of Strait of Malacca.

The Kuala Lumpur Declaration

The five ASEAN members were very much disturbed due to the political developments in Southeast Asia in 1971 and hence they issued a Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in Southeast Asia.

The political developments of early 1970s, led the ASEAN leaders to apprehend a possible destabilisation in the region. Therefore, they began to search for different means to achieve the security and stability of the region.

For instance, to secure regional stability, Indonesia developed the Doctrine of National Resilience.
Singapore is a free port city. Her industrial progress and economic development depend on the presence and cooperation of all the big powers. Therefore she preferred a balanced presence of all the big powers.

On the other hand, Thailand feared a communist and militant neighbour like Vietnam. Therefore, Thai leaders opted for a policy of armed neutrality.

The Philippines had dispute with the PRC and Vietnam over the sovereignty of island of Spratley. Therefore, the Philippines preferred the policy of balance of power, which could guarantee the security of the region.

Malaysia preferred an equidistant relationship between the Southeast Asian countries and the big powers viz., the USSR, the PRC and the US. Therefore, the members of ASEAN later, took up a collective initiative and declared Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) on 27 November, 1971. It was supposed to affect not only the relations among the ASEAN members themselves, but also their relations with the big powers involved in the region.

On 27 November 1971, at the Kuala Lumpur Conference the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and the Special Envoy of the National Executive Council of Thailand made a

105. "The concept of the balance of power assumes that through shifting alliance and counter-vailing pressures no one power or combination of powers will be allowed to grow so strong as to threaten the security of the rest" Quoted from Norman D.Palmer and Howard C.Perkins, International Relations, Scientific Book Agencies, Calcutta, 1976, p.212.
declaration which later came to be known as Kuala Lumpur Declaration. The objective of this Declaration was to bring "about a relaxation of international tension" and achieve "a lasting peace in Southeast Asia". The Foreign Ministers agreed that neutralisation was a "desirable goal", but the Declaration was all about the establishment of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality in Southeast Asia. The five foreign Ministers stated that their countries were:

1) ....determined to exert initially necessary efforts to secure the recognition of, and respect for, Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, free from any form or manner of interference by outside power; and

2) that Southeast Asia countries should make concerted efforts to broaden the areas of cooperation which would contribute to their strength, solidarity and closer relationship.

The five ASEAN members agreed to prevent big power interference in Southeast Asia but, there was disagreement among them over the means to achieve 'Neutrality'. Moreover, the ASEAN members wanted the big powers to recognise a new status but did not mention the matter of their guarantee in the Declaration. Again, Malaysia wanted the guarantee of big powers but Indonesia realised that it was not an easy task. They could not also agree whether all the big powers should be excluded from the region to achieve a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality.

Different ASEAN members responded to the Kuala Lumpur Declaration according to their political and economic conditions and geographical situation. Indeed, all the ASEAN members were anti-communist and with the exception of Indonesia, all were aligned to the West for their national security. They had decided to continue their security alliances until the concept of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality becomes a reality. Thanat Khoman of Thailand said that "we see no reason to give up, for the time being at least, our obligation to this group (SEATO) - at least not until a time when the prospects for peace, freedom and neutrality are completely assured."

Soviet View of the Proposal of ZOPFAN

The Soviet Union criticised the ASEAN states for their proposal for the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) during its early stage. According to a Soviet author, "there are still countries among those participating in drafting plans for the neutralization of Southeast Asia that directly or indirectly support the USA and hence by no means occupy a position of neutrality". In Soviet view, it was impractical to change the region into a zone of neutrality while the ASEAN members retained close security and economic relations with the big powers. Thailand and the Philippines had US military bases. In 1971 they had respectively 30,000 and 6,500 US military personnel. Therefore, according to Soviet view, these countries could not be

108. V.Kudryavtsev, Izvestia, 7 January, 1972.
109. Ibid.
neutral with foreign troops on their soil. Again, Malaysia and Singapore were the members of Five Power Defence Arrangement. They were not ready to abrogate their defence alliances with the big powers. Indonesia was also maintaining close relations with SEATO members. It convened SEATO-sponsored seminars on counter-insurgency and shared the SEATO intelligence system.

The Soviet Union could not even favour the calling of Kuala Lumpur meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers. In Soviet view, US had a mind in calling the meeting as it wanted ASEAN to play a political role in the region. Moscow Radio broadcast pointed out three days before the meeting that "US politicians are the real master minds behind the forthcoming ASEAN meeting. ASEAN, which was started as an economic and cultural organization, is gradually being changed into a military-political bloc serving the imperialist countries and their neo-colonialist objectives."

The Soviet Union was aware of the intra-regional conflicts in Southeast Asia. Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines feared Indonesia due to its vast size, great resources and large armed forces. Indonesia itself had ambitions to play an important role in the region and in ASEAN. It became a member of UN Security Council, was elected to the Presidency of the General Assembly, Vietnam Ceasefire International Control Commission and Executive Secretaryship of ECAFE. All these reflected Indonesia's importance. Furthermore,

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Malaysia did not like Singapore having tanks; Malay students opposed Thai policy towards Muslims in Southern Thailand; Indonesia wanted Singapore to release trade figures and stop smuggling; Malaysia and Indonesia declared Strait of Malacca as national water which Singapore could not support; Malaysia criticised killing of Muslims in the South Philippines; and Thailand's proposal for projection of a canal in the Kra Isthmus dissatisfied Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, as it was to affect them economically.

Thus in the Soviet view, tensions in intra-organizational relations and their differences of attitude towards neutralization were sure to affect the progress of ASEAN as an organization and it delayed the realisation of Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality. Kudryavtsev stated, "So far the position of the five Southeast Asian states on the question of the neutralization of this region obviously lack consistency." Therefore a few days after the Kuala Lumpur declaration, Pravda proposed prerequisites for the achievement of ZOPFAN in Southeast Asia. It stated that, "it is not easy to turn Southeast Asia into a peace zone. To achieve this aim it is necessary to cleanse the political atmosphere in the region that has been poisoned mainly by the US aggression in Indo-China...." Moreover there were problems of "the contradictions between the Southeast Asian countries themselves, the existence of foreign military bases, the presence of contingents of foreign troops and so forth." Vietnam also did not like the ZOPFAN proposal. The Soviet author quoted Nhan Dan, a Vietnamese newspaper from Hanoi, stating,

113. V.Kudryavtsev, op.cit
"The first thing that must be done in order to turn Southeast Asia into a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality, is to put an end to American intervention and aggression, withdraw all troops of the USA and its allies, dismantle all American military bases, dissolve all United States-controlled blocs in this region and resolutely reject the Nixon Doctrine".

The Soviet expert believed that ASEAN members fear of China led them to introduce ZOPFAN. He stated that "certain circles in the Southeast Asian countries that are most closely connected with the American ruling circles... are afraid that the USA, for the sake of its flirtation with the Maoist ruling clique in the Chinese People's Republic, will leave them to the mercy of fate or encourage Chinese expansion at their expense."

In fact, the writings of Soviet authors and Soviet broadcast shows that the Soviet Union was not against the regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. But the Soviet Union doubted its success due to continued Indochina war and military bases in the region. Hence the Peace Programme adopted by the Twenty-fourth Congress of CPSU put forward some tasks and first among them was "to eliminate the hotheads of war in Southeast Asia". The Soviet Union itself "stood for dismantling of foreign military bases".

115. V.Kudryavtsev, op.cit.
116. V.Kudryavtsev, op.cit.
The Soviet policy towards ASEAN as an organization of regional cooperation can not be studied in isolation. It is a policy which developed in perspective of her relations with, the USA, the PRC and North Vietnam. The period from 1967 to 1971 is a phase of international relations when the cold war tension started receding and the signs of detente were marked. The bipolar international system ended and a system of multipolar international political relations developed. Against this background when ASEAN was seen, the Soviet Union could not cast a favourable view. Malaysian and Indonesian proposal for nationalization of Straits of Malacca and ASEAN role in Indochina war was criticised because the Soviet Union saw the ASEAN members as the agents of the West. Even the ASEAN proposal of ZOPFAN was criticised and its feasibility was doubted as the foreign troops were stationed in most of the ASEAN countries in 1971.

The Soviet stand gradually changed in 1972, with the change in international politics. The Soviet Union realised that her hostility towards ASEAN would gradually draw her away from a group of developing countries, which were trying to assert their independent development.

The study in the next chapter will show how the international conditions and the ASEAN countries themselves helped to moulding Soviet attitude towards this regional organization during detente period, 1972-78.