CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
Southeast Asia is a modern term which is used to describe those territories which lie to the east of India and south of China. It comprises Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Laos, Kampuchea, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines and the British Protectorate of Brunei. The term gained currency during the second world war as a regional name for the imperialist possessions of four western countries - Burma, the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States of the United Kingdom (U.K.), Indo-China of the French, East Indies of the Dutch and the Philippines of the United States (U.S.) - which were occupied by Japan. It became widely accepted after the setting up of the Southeast Asia Command under Lord Louis Mountbatten in August 1943. Together these countries cover an area of one and a half million square miles and has a population of 300 million.

The region, throughout history, was known by different names. Since its early history was marked by Chinese and Indian influences, the European and Indian historians referred to it as "Greater India" or "Farther India"; the Chinese called it "Nanyang" or the "Southern Seas". The region lies between two oceans and two cultures and, therefore, Prof. Cressey holds the view that it may be described as "Indo-Pacific".

Southeast Asia is a tropical region spread across

the equator from 25 N to 10 S. Geographically the area could be conveniently divided into two parts: (1) Peninsular or mainland Southeast Asia, consisting of Burma, Thailand, Kampuchea, Laos, Vietnam, West Malaysia and Singapore and (2) Insular or island Southeast Asia which includes the islands forming Indonesia, the Philippines, East Malaysia and Brunei. To some extent, Southeast Asia is separated from other parts of Asia by a chain of mountain ranges extending from the Himalayas eastward to Southern China.

Southeast Asia had always been subjected to external influences and these came mainly through the sea. Laos is the only landlocked country in the region and the other

countries face upon the sea. Indonesia, the largest and the most populous country, consists of more than 3,000 islands. The Philippines is another island country and it consists of more than 7,000 islands, though most of them are tiny and uninhabited. The ease of maritime communication has made the ocean a "unifying force" especially in insular Southeast Asia. The growth of maritime empires in coastal areas, the spread of Indian cultural influence, the arrival of Islam, the impact of colonial powers - all these vividly illustrate the immense influence that the sea has exerted throughout Southeast Asian history.

No other region in the world perhaps exhibits so much diversity, both racial and cultural, as Southeast Asia does. Not only each country represents a distinct tradition, but within each country there are further sub-divisions. There are substantial minority groups in all countries and the various groups pursue their own culture, language, religion and social traditions. In Southeast Asia one can see people following almost all the important religions of the world - Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Taoism and Confucianism. The peoples of the region speak more than 150 different languages and dialects. The task of integrating these various social groups into one nation is a serious problem facing all Southeast Asian countries.
The leaders of modern Indonesia recognized it as the most crucial problem and adopted as their national motto 4

**Bhinneka Tunggal Ika** (Though divided we are one).

The movement of various races and blending of cultures, which has been taking place over many centuries, according to Prof. Dobby, is due to three sets of factors - (1) easy accessibility of the area, especially through the sea, (2) the location of the region between two great "culture worlds", India and China, and (3) the fertility of the land and scarcity of population. The area, therefore, acted as "magnet to the migrants" in much the same way as American Prairies attracted settlers from Europe. 5

Southeast Asia is extremely rich in natural and mineral resources. The region produces 90 per cent of the world's natural rubber, more than 50 per cent of its tin, 75 per cent of its copra, 55 per cent of its palm oil and 20 per cent of its tungsten. The geologists are of the view that the area possesses enormous resources of minerals like iron, manganese, nickel, chromium, tungsten and bauxite.

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5. Buchanan, n.2, p.25
besides considerable oil deposits. It is clear, therefore, that the region has tremendous potentials for economic development.

Economically, Southeast Asian countries enjoy a higher standard of living than their two immediate neighbours, India and China. There had never been extreme famine conditions which is a characteristic feature of the economic history of India and China. Except in Singapore, Java and parts of Luzon there is no great problem of overpopulation. In fact, it can be argued that with their vast unexploited resources, a higher rate of population growth may be a welcome factor in many countries.

Although each one of these countries has its own problems and its own sense of national identity, a diligent scholar can discern certain themes which give a unity to the area, indeed to the whole of the Third World, including India. First, there is the urgent need to create institutional framework which will enable these countries to overcome their endemic problems and achieve effective mobilization of human and natural resources. We can here underline the contrast with countries of Europe where economic development took place within existing societies which evolved over centuries. In Southeast Asia, like other
parts of the Third World, such national societies do not exist. The second theme is the search for national identity. The Southeast Asian countries have emerged into free states with no well defined national territories. Under these circumstances, the nationalist leaders frequently turn back to the golden age of the past as a means of creating a national consciousness. The glories of the past provided a model in many cases as in Sukarno's Indonesia and Sihanouk's Cambodia. A third theme is the tendency to concentrate power in the hands of one individual or a dominant party. Partly this is the consequence of the absence of a middle class and very often it manifests itself in the political organization of the state around a charismatic leader, for example, Sukarno and Sihanouk.

Finally it must be emphasized that the future of Southeast Asia is being shaped not only by dynamic internal forces, but also by external forces striving to achieve a dominant position in this crucial area of resource-rich nations. The traumatic changes in Southeast Asia after the second world war must be seen against this background of national self-assertion of these peoples and the co-operative-competitive relations among the U.S., the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.), Japan, the U.K., France
and Holland to dominate the region. In this interesting interplay between internal and external forces, India's policy towards Southeast Asia assumes great significance.

In its relations with Southeast Asian countries, India possesses definite advantages, which countries like the U.S., the U.K., France, Holland, Japan and the P.R.C. lack. As an Indian scholar has remarked, "India does not evoke the memories of an imperialist past in Southeast Asian minds". Except the Chola invasion and the consequent domination of Sri Vijaya for a short interval in the eleventh century, the relations between India and Southeast Asia were not vitiated by any unpleasant or discordant notes. The shared memories of imperialist domination and exploitation and the prolonged struggle to attain independence further cemented the links between India and the countries of Southeast Asia. After independence, all these countries, like India, were engaged in the great task of building national unity, provide a decent life to the large masses of poor people and bring about educational and cultural advancement. Since development could take place only in an environment of peace

6. V. Suryanarayan, "India and Southeast Asia", India Quarterly (New Delhi), vol. 34, p. 263
and stability, the leaders of many of these countries did not want to get entangled in the cobwebs of either cold or hot war.

The fruitful cultural and commercial interaction between India and the Southeast Asian countries, which spanned a period of nearly fifteen centuries, is a vivid illustration of India's relations with Southeast Asia at its best. India and Southeast Asia had very close commercial and cultural contacts from the early years of the Christian era. Though these relations assumed different forms in different periods and were closely linked with changing patterns of polity and society, the end result was a magnificent cultural efflorescence. Indian influences are all pervasive in Southeast Asia - polity, language, mythology, religion, art, dance and music - all have been moulded and enriched as a result of contact with India. The spread of Indian cultural influences and their absorption by Southeast Asian peoples, it must be emphasized, was not a consequence of conquest and subjugation; it took place through peaceful means and was a testimony to the courage and zeal of Indian princes, priests, poets and artisans and the ingratiating and assimilable qualities of Southeast Asian peoples alike. References to Southeast Asia by

Indian historians as "Hindu Colonies" and "Greater India" may be deemed as pardonable exaggeration; but, what is more relevant is the acknowledgement of cultural indebtedness by Southeast Asian leaders themselves. Inaugurating the Jawaharlal Nehru Boulevard in Phnom Penh on 10 May 1955, Prince Sihanouk said:

When we refer to two thousand year old ties which united us with India, it is not at all a hyperbole. In fact, it was about two thousand years ago that the first navigators, Indian merchants and Brahmins brought to our ancestors their Gods, their techniques, their organization. Briefly, India was for us what Greece was to the Latin Occident.8

The presence of a large number of Indians in Southeast Asia, especially in Burma and Malaya, added a new dimension to India's relations with Southeast Asia. The large scale immigration of Indians took place in the era of European domination. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, under the protective umbrella of the British, large number of Indian immigrants, mostly labourers, merchants and money-lenders went to Burma and Malaya and to a lesser extent to Thailand, Indo-China and the East Indies. From the 1930's, number of Indian teachers, doctors, technicians and white-collar workers...

8. Ibid., pp.131-2
also migrated to these countries. In the economic development of Malaya and Burma and the transformation of their subsistence economies to commercial economies the Indians played a significant role. While the vast majority of Indians led a peaceful life, the nefarious practices of a few Indians, especially the Chettiaris in Burma, who exploited the indigenous people is a tragic chapter in India's relations with Burma. Suspicion and hostility towards Indian immigrants, occasionally leading to violent riots, is as much a part of modern Burmese history as Burmese struggle for independence. During the second World War, there was an unprecedented political awakening among the Indian community and thousands of them rallied to the call of the Indian National Army to fight for Indian independence. The cause of Indians overseas had always been dear to the Indian nationalist leaders and representatives of Indian organizations abroad regularly attended the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress. The nationalist leaders repeatedly stressed the necessity to safeguard the interests of these unfortunate people, who had to leave the shores of Mother India to cater to the needs of imperialist Britain. In the course of a visit to Malaya and Singapore in March 1946, Pandit Nehru said, "When India becomes free,
her hands will be long and powerful to protect each and
everyone of her children abroad."

From the strategic point of view also, India and the countries of Southeast Asia are closely interlinked. India has common land frontiers with Burma and the southernmost point of the Nicobar Island is only seventy miles away from the northern coast of the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. During the imperialist phase, in the name of ensuring the security of the Indian empire, the British pursued a forward policy and extended their control to Burma and the Malay peninsula and also to far flung regions of the Indian ocean arc. The Dutch and the French were collaborators and junior partners in this imperialist game. The important trade routes of South and Southeast Asia were controlled by the imperialist powers and bulk of the trade was between the colonies and the European powers. The second world war clearly revealed the bankruptcy of British defence thinking. As the Indian historian, K.M. Panikkar, has written "the war altered the character of Indian defence".

9. Quoted in V. Suryanarayan, "The Neglected Minority - Indians in Malay", Research paper presented in National Seminar on People of Indian Descent in Southeast Asia, 6-7 December 1980, India International Centre, New Delhi, p.1

The Japanese swept through Southeast Asia, occupied the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and bombed Ceylon and northeastern parts of India. The Indian nationalist leaders clearly understood the lessons of war and realized the necessity to formulate a new foreign policy, completely different from that of imperialist Britain, which would ensure the long term security and stability of India and Southeast Asia.

India had also considerable economic stakes in Southeast Asia. Mention has already been made of the Indian community and their economic interests in Burma and Malaya. In addition, India also depended on imports from Burma, Thailand and Vietnam to meet its huge rice deficit. Although the bulk of foreign trade of India and Southeast Asia was directed towards the metropolitan countries of Europe, the trade between India and Southeast Asia was not insignificant. In 1938-39 the countries of Southeast Asia accounts for about 9 per cent of India's total exports. The principal items India exported were cotton textiles, jute manufactures, coal and vegetable oils. India's imports from Southeast Asia in 1938-39 accounted for 20 per cent of India's total imports. The
principal items of import were rice, petroleum, wood, palm oil, quinine and non-ferrous metals.

India did not start on a clean slate in foreign affairs on 15 August 1947. The basic features of India's foreign policy had slowly evolved in the course of India's long struggle for freedom. This element of continuity is a unique feature of India's diplomatic history. Nehru himself repeatedly emphasized this point. Speaking in the Indian Parliament Nehru said:

It is completely incorrect to call our policy "Nehru" policy. It is incorrect because all that I have done is to give voice to that policy. I have not originated it. It is a policy inherent in the circumstances of India, inherent in the past thinking of India, inherent in the whole mental outlook of India, inherent in the conditioning of the Indian mind during our struggle for freedom, and inherent in the circumstances of the world today.

Three important elements were inherited from the nationalist movement by the foreign policy makers.

11. B.N. Ganguli, India's Economic Relations with the Far Eastern and Pacific Countries (Calcutta, 1956), pp. 18-19

12. Excellent accounts of origins of India's foreign policy are provided in (1) Bimal Prasad, The Origins of Indian Foreign Policy (Calcutta, 1960); (2) Birendra Prasad, Indian Nationalism and Asia (Delhi, 1979); (3) J.C. Kundra, Indian Foreign Policy 1947-54 (Groningen, 1955) and (4) N.V. Rajkumar, The Background of India's Foreign Policy (Delhi, 1952)

of free India. Foremost among them was support to anti-colonial struggles in Asia and Africa. The Indian nationalist leaders, especially Gandhi and Nehru, took a global view of the Indian nationalist movement. Since "Asia's European age" commenced with the British subjugation of India, so would British withdrawal from India lead to the end of colonialism in Asia. To quote Gandhi: "Freedom of India will demonstrate to all the exploited races of the earth that their freedom is very near and that in no case will they henceforth be exploited". Indian support and solidarity with the oppressed people and also Indian concern over the deteriorating international situation were forcefully articulated by Jawaharlal Nehru, who became the principal spokesman of the Indian National Congress on world affairs. The League against Imperialism with which Nehru was actively associated considered India "to be the central problem in the struggle of the Asiatic peoples for their national freedom". As time went on there was hardly any issue of international importance on which the Indian National Congress did not express


15. Werner Levi, Free India in Asia (Minneapolis, 1952), p. 34
its views. Delegates from Asian and African countries occasionally attended the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress or conferred with their Indian counterparts to evolve counter dynamics against imperialism. With such an outlook on world affairs, it was in the fitness of things for leaders of free India not only to oppose, but rally world opinion against racialism, imperialism and colonialism. So long as any country suffered under the economic, political or racial domination of any other country, India and the world could not be considered to be really free and peace and security would continue to be in jeopardy.

Secondly, the Indian nationalist leaders did not want India to get entangled in wars of imperialist and fascist powers. In fact, in the very first session of the Indian National Congress in 1885, a resolution was passed condemning the annexation of Upper Burma to the Indian empire. In later years, the Indian National Congress expressed its strong disapproval of the use of Indian troops across the Indian frontiers to serve imperialist interests. Although the Indian National Congress supported the British government during the first world war with the hope that Indian support would
hasten India's independence, it opposed the British during the second world war in view of British reluctance to assure independence. Thus freedom from colonial domination and opposition to power politics were two main elements of Indian nationalist perception of world affairs.

Thirdly, the Indian leaders were convinced that Free India was destined to play a major and benign role in world affairs. The inability to play a meaningful role, so long as India was under foreign domination, further gave a fillip to this urge. Wherever possible, there was non-official involvement as in the despatch of medical mission to China and the assistance rendered to Republican Spain against Fascist Franco. Geographically India was the meeting point of the East and the West, the North and the South; it was the second most populous country in the world and had immense potentials for economic development. With such resources in men and materials, India was destined to play a vital role in world affairs. Pointing out the geographical importance of India, Nehru remarked:

It is fitting that India should play her role in this new phase of Asian development. Apart from the fact that India herself is
emerging into freedom and independence, she is the natural centre and focal point of many forces at work in Asia. Geography is a compelling factor, and geographically she is so situated as to be the meeting point of western and northern and eastern and southeast Asia. Because of this, the history of India is a long history of her relations with other countries of Asia.16.

Non-alignment, which is the sheet anchor of India's foreign policy since independence, was the natural outcome of the three ideas mentioned above. It enabled India to steer clear of the cold war, play an active role in world affairs in furtherance of freedom from colonial domination and promotion of world peace. It is worthwhile to underline the fact that these principles and objectives were eloquently articulated by Jawaharlal Nehru in the first major speech as the Vice-President of the Interim Government on 7 September 1946:

We propose, as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to world wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even vaster scale. We believe that peace and

16. Nehru, n.13, p.250
freedom are indivisible and the denial of freedom anywhere must endanger freedom elsewhere and lead to conflict and war. We are particularly interested in the emancipation of colonial and dependent countries and peoples, and in the recognition in theory and practice of equal opportunities for all races.17.

With this brief introductory background, it is now proposed to analyse India's relations with Southeast Asia.