

Jaswant to visit Vietnam

By Atul Aneja

119
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NEW DELHI, AUG. 31. India is seeking to add a powerful cultural dimension to its economic diplomacy in South East Asia by encouraging business contacts between the people residing in the Mekong and Ganga deltas.

The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, is visiting Vientiane, capital of Laos, in early November to formally launch the Ganga-Mekong Swarnabhoomi project. The Foreign Ministers of Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia will be present on the occasion.

"Both the Ganga and the Mekong are civilisational rivers and the project aims to facilitate closer contacts among the people inhabiting these two river basins," a Foreign Office official said.

The aim of the project was to exploit the historically driven "natural connectivity" among the people of the two deltas. It was also aimed at improving the communication links between India and the region. This involves con-

struction of trans-Asian railway lines, roads and establishment of new air links. Most of these proposals were likely to fall within the ambit of the Asian Highway project, sponsored by ESCAP.

Promotion of tourism was a natural fall-out of better communication links. Preliminary discussions showed that "pilgrim tourism" which includes travel by the people of the region to Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the six countries was promising. With "human resource development" being yet another focal area, India had offered to train the people in the region in Information Technology.

The External Affairs Minister's meetings in Laos were likely to be preceded by an official visit to Vietnam. In Vietnam, Mr. Singh may concretise agreements in the areas already identified. India and Vietnam- the current chairman of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)- have already identified a common economic and defence agenda.

Vietnam's Ambassador to In-

dia, Mr. Pham Sy Tam, told *The Hindu* that Hanoi and New Delhi were likely to expand their cooperation in the oil and gas sector. The Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) had pledged 250 million dollars for developing an off-shore natural gas field in Vietnam. Besides, Vietnam which exported around 16.8 million tonnes of crude globally, was negotiating a tie-up on oil sale with Reliance Corporation. Vietnam's presence on India's energy security map was likely to push up the trade which stood at a modest 150 million dollars dramatically.

Vietnam which was rapidly expanding its hi-technology base was looking at tapping the Indian market for computer monitors and colour televisions. Export of coal, construction material, including decorative bricks and ceramic items, were some of the other thrust areas, Mr. Pham said.

India and Vietnam were keen on cooperation in the security arena. Both were likely to hold joint naval exercises and enhance the training of personnel, he said.

India offers IT expertise to Asean countries

Bangkok, July 29

INDIA TODAY offered its expertise in information technology (IT) and research and development sectors to Asean nations and underscored the need of "infinite" cooperation in areas of trade and investments with the 10-member group.

India's expertise in the IT and research and development sectors provided ample opportunities for Asean members to strengthen their partnership with New Delhi, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh told a post-ministerial conference of ten-member Asean here.

He said there were "infinite" areas of Indo-Asean cooperation in areas of trade and investment, human resource development, science and technology and tourism.

The recommendations of an HRD study commissioned by the working group on trade and investment would add further substance to the economic dimension of Asean-India ties, he said.

A meeting of academicians from Indian and Asean universities is scheduled for October in New Delhi in this regard.

Singh said India could play a role to help Asean make a leap into the new economy.



US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (R) and Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh (L) during a bilateral talks on the last day of the 33rd Asean ministerial meeting in Bangkok on Saturday. Photo: AFP

He noted that a process has been initiated to prepare a study on trade with Asean free trade area (AFTA) which could lead a new source of economic growth.

Earlier, Singapore, which is the

country coordinator of the Asean-India dialogue, said strategic and geopolitical changes in the last decade or so had led India to re-engage the region in a "positive manner."

"India's strategic importance cannot be overlooked," Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar said and referred to US President Bill Clinton's visit to India in march which, he maintained sig-

nalled the beginning of a new era in Indo-US relations as also President K.R. Narayanan's visit to China and the recent Indo-EU summit in Lisbon.

"These meetings underline the strategic value that India offers to other countries. In this regard, India's strategic engagement with Southeast Asia will also need to evolve for both regions to reap mutual gains," he said.

Jayakumar told the Asean meeting that the offer by India to train 100 Asean nominees in "state-of-the-art" applications has also been enthusiastically taken up by the Asean members.

"Through its economic reforms and its vast pool of talent, India is also playing an increasingly important role at the frontiers of the new global economy in the software and IT fields," he said.

Maintaining that India's economic reforms have opened up many opportunities for Asean business, he said in the last five years, Asean's total exports to India had tripled from \$ 1.48 billion to 5.36 billion.

Jayakumar said efforts have to be made to put in place mechanisms to deal with bureaucratic obstacles to allow for quicker implementation of projects.

(PTI)

India, Singapore & the Mekong Basin

By V. Jayanth

THE SINGAPORE Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong's offer to make the city-state a catalyst for India's economic reforms comes at an opportune time. Those who have not fully comprehended its capacity might even wonder how such a small country with just three million people dares to make the offer. But that is exactly what Singapore can do best — market. Way back in 1993-94, Mr. Goh realised the importance of India and decided to focus Singapore's attention on the 'caged tiger' as this country was first described.

Now that the Indian economy is all set to grow at a sustained level of around 7 per cent and perhaps accelerate the pace in a couple of years, the opportunities for trade and investment can only increase. It is not as though Singapore will emerge as the main investor, but it can certainly undertake a joint marketing of the potential. For such a small state, it can boast of the largest presence of multinationals which have shaped the emergence of its new economy. This, in addition to its presence in and understanding of East Asia or the Asia Pacific region, makes Singapore an ideal partner to venture into that region of fundamental investments in India.

For Indian industry, it is important to expand and attract more investment inflows. It has to become a regional and then global player. Some time ago, Mr. Goh made an offer to a visiting CII delegation for joining a combined trade and investment mission to a third country — Vietnam, for instance. Instead of risking it alone in a virgin territory, joint ventures are a worthy option. What is being thought of is to marry India's enterprise or appropriate (affordable) technology with the investible surplus in Singapore and its marketing expertise. That combination can provide a cutting edge in not just Southeast Asian countries but the entire East Asia.

Singapore took the initiative to focus attention on emerging India. In 1997, it hosted the first Global Indian Entrepreneurs

Conference to begin networking not just non-resident Indians but the ethnic Indian community around the world. The objective was to emerge as a catalytic force to channel investments in India and offer a wide range of consultancy as well as financial services for those who want to set up shop in the country. A follow-up conference was held in India but that became an NRI show. Mauritius is planning to host the next conference later this year, since a

Mr. Goh's offer and Singapore's expertise should be considered. Together, India and Singapore can do a lot in that region. Both countries have a keen commitment to the region and have already taken an interest in Vietnam, which is also gearing for some much-delayed economic reforms. India invested politically in Indochina a good three decades ago and still remains an 'old friend' of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Together, India and Singapore can do a lot in the Mekong Basin... The stage has come to convert political capital into economic opportunities and cooperative ventures.

lot of foreign investment in India is being routed through that country.

There was a setback to the emerging Indian economy following the collapse of successive coalitions from 1996 to 1998. Now that the Vajpayee regime appears holding and the economy is on the road to a 7 per cent growth in the GDP this year, there is a renewed interest in India. If the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, pushes through the second generation reforms, besides completing the earlier round of liberalisation, red tape and bureaucracy may be kept out of the way of foreign investors. These have been the major impediment to realising the economic potential, besides the dithering by politicians in power over policy.

India has a good focus now on Southeast Asia and may be strengthening its equities with Thailand, Indonesia and Myanmar. But it cannot afford to lose interest in Indochina, which is now being marketed as the Mekong Basin, with southern China as an additional element and the ADB deeply involved. Because of the East Asian economic crisis, a whole lot of Mekong development programmes were put into cold storage. With economic recovery, it is quite likely that some of these will be re-

countries, India's public and private sectors must look for opportunities in the whole region — the Mekong Basin. Transport, communications and infrastructure are the key sectors that will receive first attention, followed by the service sector. At least for the next decade, the region will not be able to afford Western technology and that is why most of it is looking to India for relevant, appropriate and affordable technology. Agriculture will be an area of prime focus and here too, India and its scientists can provide vital inputs to the region.

But the real life-line of the region will be the Trans-Asian Railway. With the Bangkok-based ESCAP also getting involved in the studies, experts are planning to link up South Asia with southern China, to start with, and ultimately with Russia and Central Asia, where there is already a network. India must not only be concerned about establishing the South Asian link or tail to connect with Myanmar, Thailand and Indochina but also get a slice of the project consultancy/construction. The public sector railway companies such as IRCON and RITES must be able to get involved in the evolution and construction of this dream project. Besides energising Indochina, such a railway network which connects parts of South Asia, Southeast Asia, China and Central Asia (perhaps into Europe) can change the face of the region and revolutionise trade.

An equally fascinating sector for India to take the lead is information technology. With Singapore's partnership, it will be easier to enter not just the less developed areas of Southeast Asia but also Indochina. Beginning with computer education, the effort should be to gradually enhance training and exposure to core areas of IT in due course. But when it comes to reaching out to Indochina, Thailand will be a useful partner, and it also hopes to become the gateway to Mekong Basin states. A joint strategy to develop and tap the potential of that region could form the basis of the next phase of the India-ASEAN partnership.

India explores ways to deepen ties with ASEAN

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 10. — India today discussed ways to deepen its engagement with the ASEAN and countries of the Mekong basin.

The issue was discussed during talks between the visiting Thailand foreign minister, Dr Surin Pitsuwan, and the external affairs minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, today.

Dr Pitsuwan is here both as the Thai foreign minister and also as the chairman of the ASEAN post-ministerial conference scheduled to be held in Thailand later this month.

The two countries signed agreements for bilateral investment promotion and protection and for peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The two leaders also discussed progress on the extradition treaty. India was informed that the treaty would be taken up by the Thai Cabinet soon. The treaty assumes relevance because of the arrest of the NSCN leader Th Muivah in Thailand recently.

The two leaders also discussed a proposal mooted by Dr Pitsuwan to have a mechanism that would not only set up a long term perspective on relations but also suggest mid-course corrections if necessary.

They discussed the Transasian highway project. India's cooperation with Thailand and other ASEAN countries in the area of information technology was also discussed. UN reforms were also discussed at the meeting.

THE STATESMAN

11 JUL 2000

Thailand backs India's bid for U.N. seat

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 10. The visiting Foreign Minister of Thailand, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, today discussed reforms in the United Nations with his Indian counterpart, Mr. Jaswant Singh, as part of the attempt by developing countries to make the multilateral body more relevant and responsive in the contemporary context. Thailand is also understood to have agreed in principle with India's attempt to obtain a seat in the UN Security Council.

Dr. Surin impressed on the need to work out a mechanism for monitoring and encouraging bilateral interaction on a long-term basis. He felt there was more scope for cooperation as India shared historic ties with countries in the Mekong basin. The two Ministers also discussed the signing of an extradition treaty, with Dr. Surin assuring India that the Thai Cabinet will take up the issue in the near future.

Referring to the agreements for promotion and protection of investments and on utilising atomic energy for peaceful purposes which were signed today with Mr. Jaswant Singh, the Thai Minister felt they reflected the willingness by both countries to address "outstanding obstacles".

Later, speaking at his only public engagement of the day, Dr. Surin felt Governments of both countries should act as catalysts to "jump start" bilateral economic relations which have hit a plateau.

Now that the economic crisis in South-East Asian countries had abated, the time was opportune to impart a fresh momentum to bilateral economic activities, he



The Foreign Minister of Thailand, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, being welcomed by the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, at the latter's residence in New Delhi on Monday. — Photo: Shanker Chakravarty

told industrialists belonging to the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) here.

Though there was significant room for expansion of bilateral trade, the Foreign Minister said there were "some challenges" in the way of "fullest cooperation".

Chief among them was the ponderous system of approving foreign investment proposals, Dr. Surin said. "The efforts of the private sector will be blunted without the active and serious participation of the Indian Government. (It) should keep up its excellent work and commitment in improving the investment environment for foreigners, such as

through the future development of a one-stop-shop service," he observed.

The Minister dwelt on five sectors which had significant potential for growth and, therefore, "deserve our fullest attention and interest". These were the computer industry, the IT and e-commerce industry, agro, construction and tourism. In each of these, the two nations shared common ground and could complement each other's strengths.

In the computer and computer software industry, for instance, India had highly skilled personnel in software development while

Thailand excelled in hardware production.

"I envision that our close collaboration could engender our two nations to become digital partners who can provide bundles of high quality computers and software for the global marketplace. To take this idea further, India could very well be the country of choice for customised software development while Thailand could be the one for computer hardware in the future," he expounded. Dr. Surin also saw similar synergies in the other four areas.

MoU on agriculture to be signed soon

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 10. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for cooperation between India and Thailand in the field of agriculture is likely to be signed shortly.

The Union Cabinet has already accorded its approval for the MoU, while Dr. Pitsuwan, has expressed his keenness on signing of the MoU. Incidentally, Mr. Pitsuwan has himself been a student of an Indian Agriculture University.

During a meeting with Mr. Pitsuwan, the Union Agriculture Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, expressed his willingness to extend cooperation and all assistance to Thailand in the field of agriculture for mutual benefit.

India and Thailand are members of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thai Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) and Indian Ocean Rim Association-Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) which has 19 members.

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India cannot be considered out of Islamic world: Wahid

By Amit Baruah

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ISLAMABAD, JUNE 16 The visiting Indonesian President, Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, today delivered an important message to Pakistan - that India with "more than 80 million Muslims" - could not be considered "out of the Islamic world". Addressing a joint press conference with the Pakistani Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, the Indonesian President took the diplomatic path while dealing with Kashmir and the issue of alleged human rights violations.

In response to a question on Kashmir and India "not implementing" the U.N. resolutions, Mr. Wahid said Indonesia was "taking the position of Pakistan that everything should be discussed (with India)". Negotiations, he stressed, was the main factor in international diplomacy today.

In what appeared to belittle the U.N. resolutions, Mr. Wahid said he was too old to remember "solutions" and their "numbers". It was "too old" for him, the President stated. In his view, Indonesia was "on the side of the Pakistanis without neglecting the Indians".

Coming out in support of negotiations between India and Pakistan, Mr. Wahid stated that not all things could be forced on everybody. Today, he said, India was speaking of

negotiations with conditions; who knows what could happen later? Mr. Wahid said he told Gen. Musharraf in Havana recently that he should not be disappointed with such a response.

On Indonesia playing the role of mediator between the two countries, Mr. Wahid said such a request had to come from both sides - not only from Pakistan, but also from India. This issue, he said, had to be dealt with realistically. If there was a request from both sides, Indonesia was prepared to mediate.

Supporting Pakistan's entry into the Asian Regional Forum (ARF), Mr. Wahid said it was not "not clear" whether all Indian Muslims were suffering discrimination when asked about the killing of "80,000 Muslims" in Kashmir.

Referring to the long tradition in India where Muslims were in Government, Mr. Wahid took the names of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Zakir Hussain and currently those of persons like Mr. Waheeduddin Khan and Mr. Asghar Ali Engineer. The Indonesian President said if there was discrimination against Muslims in India, Jakarta would take it up with New Delhi. But, he said, it was not clear that this was happening.

Maintaining that this did not mean he did not care for people's suffering, Mr. Wahid

told the questioner: "If several thousand people, as you say, have something done to them, then we have to say there is no smoke without fire. I would like to examine not only the smoke, but also the fire."

While he did not explain his definition of the "smoke and the fire", Mr. Wahid was, clearly, referring to the conditions behind the trouble in Indian Kashmir and, possibly, referring to the role of Pakistan in the situation there. Charting his own course on India-Pakistan relations, the President was, however, more supportive of Gen. Musharraf and his military regime. Mr. Wahid said there were good and bad people in both the Army and civilian institutions. Democracy, he said, was not only about who rules - but about the eradication of corruption and the rule of law, among other things.

Interestingly, while there was a joint press conference, no joint statement was issued. Both Mr. Wahid and Gen. Musharraf made reference to the need to enhance economic cooperation, but no concrete announcements were made. Mr. Wahid did, however, say that his Commerce Minister would shortly visit Pakistan to work out details of specific cooperation between Jakarta and Islamabad. The President also referred to Indonesia making military purchases from Pakistan.

17 JUN 2000

17 JUN 2000

Indo-Vietnam naval exercises mark

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

San Francisco, May 9: Even as Indian warships prepare to sail into the South China Sea for joint military exercises with Vietnam, they face the distinct possibility of stirring up a storm as media reports suggest the move "appears certain to antagonise China."

Japan and South Korea. Beijing claims sovereignty over the Spratly Islands and other shoals and islands throughout the South China Sea.

Last month defence minister George Fernandes said Indian naval and coast guard ships would "shortly launch joint exercises in the South China Sea."

private intelligence reporting group based in Austin, Texas. "India plans to leave four to five warships, a submarine and air-reconnaissance planes in the South China Sea for some time after the exercises. It is also preparing to launch a Kilo-class submarine operations. However, which recently signed an agreement to train Indian troops in jungle warfare, will directly engage in military naval exercises.

The Washington Times quoted Larry Wortzel, director of the Asian Studies Center at the

who said India's growing alliance against any country in Asia," he said. "We would not ask India to do that in any event. But what is underscored is that India is beginning to arrive as a serious player."

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India raises anti-piracy issue at ARF meet

By P. S. Suryanarayana

BANGKOK, MAY 19. With the "security implications of globalisation" becoming the new buzzword of the Association of South-East Asian Nations' Regional Forum (ARF), India on Thursday diversified its diplomatic activism within this elite group by taking the initiative for fashioning a collective strategy to combat international piracy, a key new concern in the wider domain of security issues.

At the ARF's meeting of senior officials in Bangkok on Thursday, India circulated a concept paper on anti-piracy issues and offered to host a workshop for the forum members on this subject in Mumbai next October. The ARF consists of all the members of the Association of South East Asian Nations and a host of major and medium powers, like the U.S. as also Japan and China, besides India, with whom the ASEAN engages in a dialogue on security questions of direct concern.

India announced its new ARF initiative even as the diplomatic pressure on it over its nuclear arms testing continued to ease inside this forum without evaporating altogether, though.

Asked about the receding ARF focus over India's nuclear armament option, a senior official of the host country, Thailand, confirmed that the current level of the forum's collective concern was not as severe as it was in 1998. A series of steps taken by India, inclusive of the enunciation of a nuclear security doctrine of peaceful intentions, has transpar-

ently brought into being a new ground reality. Without explicitly citing this as the factor at work, the senior Thai official indicated that India's nuclear profile was still "at the back of the minds of some countries" at present.

A U.S. delegate hinted that the South Asian nuclear arms question still caused a blip on the ARF's radar screen. It is understood that the U.S. and the European Union referred to the Indian nuclear security posture at the ARF session. The ASEAN countries, on the other hand, did not express any apprehensions, while Australia as also Canada and China, who had been hawkish in the past against India's nuclear compulsions, did not seek to flay New Delhi on Thursday. Even Japan appeared to have struck a subdued note on the larger South Asian nuclear scene.

However, in view of the lingering references to the Indian nuclear issue, there was still no finality about whether it would be taken off the ARF agenda ahead of the forum's annual ministerial meeting scheduled to be held here later.

With the ARF turning its spotlight on the security-related consequences of globalisation as the prime issue, at Thailand's suggestion, the participants, including India, began taking a close at the varied aspects of the concept.

The ARF officials today reached a consensus to recommend to the Foreign Ministers of member-States that North Korea be admitted to the forum.

20 MAY 2000

Jakarta eyes Indian investments

By V. Jayanth

CHENNAI, APRIL 9. With India-Indonesia ties on the upswing following the February visit of the Indonesian President, Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, the two Governments are exploring various avenues to enhance bilateral trade and cooperation.

Though bilateral trade has been maintaining a steady growth in recent years, the economic meltdown in 1997 created major problems. Even then, Indonesia's trade with India did not suffer to extent it did with other countries.

Despite the continuing political strife and protests by youth on some islands, Indonesia remains an attractive tourist destination. But Jakarta is now keen on forging stronger economic links with India and is inviting Indian industry to look at opportunities in a reviving and diversifying economy.

Mr. Zakaria Soemintaatmadja, who took over as Indonesia's Ambassador to India early this year, has arrived on his first visit to Chennai. He will familiarise him-

self with the industrial, trade and cultural circles here in a bid to strengthen bonds.

In recent years, tourist arrivals from India are stated to be on the rise. Indonesia is hoping to receive over five million tourists from around the world in 2000, from a conservative 3.93 million in 1999. The tourism industry earned foreign exchange of about \$ 4.4 billion last year.

According to Indonesia's Hon. Consul here, Ms. S.M. Padamsee, the new Ambassador was keen on forging new ties with Indian industry and would meet leading industrialists during his visit.

Mr. Suresh Krishna and Mrs. Mallika Srinivasan are among the group of industrialists Mr. Soemintaatmadja will meet. The Ambassador also will call on the Tamil Nadu Governor at the Raj Bhavan and meet top officials of the State Government.

During the past few years, hundreds of professionals from Tamil Nadu had taken up jobs in Indonesia. But after the 1997 crisis,

many of them returned because of the collapse of some companies and the severe financial crisis faced by others. With the Indonesian economy projected to grow by nearly 4 per cent in 2000, these doors could open again.

But more important, the Indonesian Government is looking for more investments in strategic sectors from India. Even during the difficult year that has gone by, the Investment Coordinating Board approved total foreign investments of \$ 10.6 billion.

Though an Indian delegation visited Indonesia last year to look at the investment potential and explore the feasibility of taking over some of the collapsed companies, nothing much came out of it. Indonesian authorities now feel that the industrial climate has improved and the private sector in India could look closely at sectors such as textiles, automotive parts, pharmaceuticals, IT and software. Collaboration in the field of education, especially technical, may be welcome.

10 APR 2001

India's nuclear profile may go off ARF radar screen

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, APRIL 9. The Association of South East Asian Nations' Regional Forum (ARF) may drop the Indian nuclear armament issues from its checklist of prime concerns in the present circumstances.

India's participation in the ARF activities is also likely to enter a new phase of hosting significant events. The prospects of a major diplomatic dividend for India brightened as the ARF Intersessional Support Group (ISG), a body of experts, concluded its meeting here yesterday, according to informed sources.

The ISG, at its previous meeting in Tokyo last November, kept the South Asian nuclear issues in focus, indicating that the situation in the subcontinent would (still) need to be "watched."

However, the Group has now displayed a willingness to let India's nuclear security profile recede from the forum's radar screen, according to sources familiar with the deliberations. The Tokyo formulation is understood to have been whittled down, and it may even be scrapped.

The ARF Ministers earlier, at their annual meeting held in Singapore last year, spoke of the "support" among themselves for "encouraging states (India and Pakistan) which had tested nuclear weapons last year (1998) to exercise restraint" and to adhere to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as also to "revive the Lahore process". This formulation pleased India which, however, dissociated itself from the passage it could not agree with at the Manila meeting in 1998.

True to the ARF traditions, the ISG's latest report, prepared by Singapore and Japan as co-chair-

men, was not a text negotiated by all participants. But it sums up the overall "sense" of the deliberations and it would be discussed by senior officials of the ARF in Bangkok next month. Its annual session would also take place there later.

Given these sequential requirements, the final fine print on the issues of direct interest to India would be known only at the conclusion of the ARF's annual session later this year.

Now the ISG's latest report will still needed to be vetted by the ARF's senior officials in Bangkok next month ahead of the ministerial meeting there later.

The progress achieved by India on this score since the ARF meeting in Manila in 1998 is traceable to New Delhi's diplomacy and patient endeavours engaging the key players of the association.

The ARF is an elite multilateral security grouping that brings together prominent global and regional players such as the U.S. as also India. The Indian delegation to the ISG meeting was led by Mr. Rakesh Sood, Joint Secretary (Disarmament and International Security Affairs).

Indications are that India would, if formally approved at the prospective ARF ministerial meeting in Bangkok, host a workshop on anti-piracy questions in New Delhi in October this year. India may also co-chair an intersessional group in 2001-2002.

The just-concluded ISG meeting took place in Singapore following Mr. Bill Clinton's recent visit to India and the enunciation of a bilateral "Vision" statement. However, while the strategic-security dimension of the new U.S.-India equation did not define or dominate the overall ISG proceedings, the outcome of the de-

liberations was reflective of New Delhi's "accelerated and intensive diplomacy" in recent months, with many of the ARF participants.

Most of these interlocutors — the leaders of ASEAN countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia at one end of the spectrum and the U.S. President and the Australian Foreign Minister, at the other end — visited India during this period.

The other factors that lent "momentum" to New Delhi's diplomatic efforts at the ISG meeting were a beginning in India's security dialogue with China, besides the thaw in the Indo-Japanese ties in the wake of differences over the nuclear arms question.

India, Bahrain pact on air services

NEW DELHI, APRIL 9. India and Bahrain have signed an air services agreement under which each side can designate up to two airlines.

The agreement was signed by the Civil Aviation Minister, Mr. Sharad Yadav, and the Minister of Transportation of Bahrain, Sheikh Ali Bin Kalifa Bin Salman al Khalifa. Under the agreement, India can operate two Bahrain via any intermediate point in Asia excluding points in the UAE, Oman and Qatar and go beyond to any point in Europe, north America and Asia excluding points in these gulf countries.

The designated Airline of Bahrain can operate to Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta, Chennai and Thiruvananthapuram via Doha, Muscat and points in the UAE. There are no traffic rights to beyond points, an official release said. — UNI

10 APR 2000

India, Vietnam partners in safeguarding sea lanes

By Atul Aneja

CALCUTTA, APRIL 14. With high stakes in the uninterrupted flow of commercial shipping, the Indian Navy has "an interest" in the ocean space extending from the North of the Arabian Sea to the South China Sea, the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, has said.

In his address while commissioning India's 3,600 tonne warship, INS Brahmaputra, the Defence Minister indicated that Japan and Vietnam were emerging as India's key strategic partners for countering piracy from the Indian waters to the South China sea. According to sources in the Navy, the stretch from India to the Malacca Straits, the gateway to South East Asia, was highly prone to piracy. The rescue of a hijacked Japanese cargo ship recently by the Navy had highlighted New Delhi and Tokyo's common strategic stake in cooperating in these waters.

India and Vietnam were also partners in safeguarding commercial sea lanes. During the recent visit of the Defence Minister to Vietnam, the Sea police of Vietnam and the Indian Navy have decided to work together to protect the commercial highways. "Our (India's) area of interest therefore extends from the North of the Arabian sea to the South China sea," Mr. Fernandes observed.

The commissioning of the Brahmaputra is part of India's efforts to beef up its naval forces



Mr. George Fernandes, Defence Minister, talking to the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sushil Kumar, during the launch of INS Brahmaputra in Calcutta on Friday.

— Photo: Sushanta Patronobish

especially along its western coastline. Not surprisingly the commissioning of the INS Brahmaputra has been preceded by the induction of the Aditya, a fleet tanker. India now has three

fleet tankers which can fuel warships in the high seas. As result, their presence gives the Navy a longer "blue water" reach.

This year is also likely to witness the induction of six other

warships as well as the commissioning of a Kilo class submarine which can fire missiles towards land targets for the first time.

The hull of five other ships including two Russian built Khrivak class frigates would also be ready this year. "From the foundation stage to commissioning, it takes around three more years to complete the ship," a Naval officer at the Garden reach shipyard where the Brahmaputra has been built said.

By the end of this year, the keel, which is the first step to construction, of two guided missile frigates will also be laid. These comprise, the Nilgiri, which will have extensive "stealth features" and will be therefore hard to detect, as well as a Tabar class frigate which will be built at the Baltiskiy shipyard in St. Petersburg.

Besides, the Navy is in the final stages of negotiating the purchase of the 40,000 tonne aircraft carrier, Admiral Gorshkov from Russia.

Sources here pointed out that the Navy was focusing on acquiring an ability to attack land targets from the sea. Not surprisingly, the Dhanush ballistic missile, which is the Naval variant of the Prithvi system was fired from the warship, Subhadra, on Monday for this purpose. The launch was, however, "experimental" and several more tests may be required to make this weapon battle worthy. The mounting of the 300 km range Russian built Klub class cruise missiles on the new Kilo class sub-

marines and the three Khrivak class frigates which India will acquire from Russia subsequently will also enhance the credibility of the Navy's land-attack capability, the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Sushil Kumar, who was also present on the occasion said.

The Brahmaputra class frigate, despite having a similar hull to the Godavari class ships which were commissioned a decade ago is distinct on other counts. Its 16 Uran missiles can strike a target of 100 km range — a feat which none of the earlier frigates with India can match. Long range punch is also acquired through the Sea Eagle missiles which are mounted on two Sea King helicopters. These missiles can attack at a range of 450 km, while underwater rockets and torpedoes on the ship can decimate hostile submarines.

The indigenous content of the Brahmaputra is very high as most of the electronic sensors, unlike other ships, have been manufactured within the country. This includes the Humvad Sonar which is especially suited to the unique conditions of Indian waters. "The Humvad can distinguish between the redundant and the relevant noises which are naturally generated in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. It also functions normally in the around the seven depth bands of Indian waters which would otherwise make the detection of hostile submarines difficult," a Naval officer said.

119-12
29/11

WOONG A MILITARY JUNTA

BY ROLLING ONT the red carpet to the Myanmar military junta's senior leader, Gen. Maung Aye, the Vajpayee Government has signalled an uncalled for warmth in relations with Myanmar but the rationale for such an enthusiastic gesture is not really clear. It is a reversal of a long-standing policy of supporting the forces of democracy in a land that has suffered most of its independent years under one military junta after another. There might be some merit in keeping any regime in Yangon engaged rather than ostracising it, particularly since sanctions have tended to penalise the innocent civilians without really hurting the repressive regimes against which they are directed. Yangon's cooperation in tackling insurgency in the Northeast and stepping up security along the vital sea lanes and its role as a gateway to the Southeast Asian region have been cited for the initiative to step up cooperation with the regime. New Delhi had by the mid-1990s recognised these and begun to engage the junta, also mindful of the reality that other powers have been more than willing to fill the vacuum in a strategically vital neighbourhood.

The pursuit of the national interest should not however come at the cost of the basic principles for which the country has stood the past half a century. For, whatever the merits of the change of policy direction, the cozying up to the military regime in Yangon is bound to have the effect of undermining the valiant struggle the Nobel laureate, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has been waging under extraordinarily trying circumstances in Myanmar. New Delhi had been one of the staunchest supporters of the dec-

ades-long democracy movement in Myanmar led by Ms. Suu Kyi. After a brief respite, she is again under house arrest. But the junta has failed to break her spirit or silence the voice of protest despite feverish attempts. In its efforts to gain global legitimacy, the regime won a major victory when the ASEAN granted it membership after a long internal debate. The current eagerly sought endorsement from New Delhi would unfortunately reinforce that legitimacy but comes at an inauspicious time, close on the heels of a major defeat suffered at the International Labour Organisation which has decided to impose sanctions.

The decision to embrace Gen. Maung also exposes New Delhi's doublespeak. Hardly six months ago, the country's representatives had argued vehemently at the forum of the Non-Aligned Movement for expulsion of military regimes that had seized power by ousting democratic Governments. The target then was Pakistan. What was — and continues to be — applicable to the neighbour to the west is apparently not thought applicable to the new-found friend in the strategic east. Here is a junta that has defied international opinion by continuing its repressive measures. Instead of legitimising the regime, New Delhi must redouble the effort to help Myanmar return to democratic rule. India's national interest will be better served by engaging a democratic society that observes the rule of law and not by courting a repressive regime. Any engagement of Yangon must have but one goal: lessen the military's hold on the impoverished society and move that country towards democracy.

THE HINDU

24 NOV 2000

City police miss Thai deadline, Rajan is freed

By S. Balakrishnan
The Times of India News Service

MUMBAI: The Mumbai police team which went to Bangkok on Thursday to bring back Chhota Rajan failed to meet the 9 a.m. deadline set by the Thai police. Underworld don Chhota Rajan was injured in an attack by the Dawood Ibrahim gang on September 15.

Sources in the Maharashtra government said the Centre had been dilly-dallying over the question of sending the city police team to Bangkok till the last moment.

A three-member police team comprising assistant commissioner Shankar Kamble, inspector Sudhakar Pujari and sub-inspector Hemant Desai had been waiting for central clearance for five days.

The team was to leave on Sunday, but on Saturday afternoon a senior official of the Union home department called Mumbai police commissioner M. N. Singh asking him to put the trip on hold pending a green signal from the Thai government.

The go-ahead finally came on Wednesday evening when Mr Singh got a call from the Union home department. "The first available flight to Bangkok was on Thursday at 5 a.m. and accordingly the team to flew to the Thai capital. But by the time it landed in Bangkok, the 9 a.m. deadline had expired and Chhota Rajan was a free man," a police official told this newspaper.

Sources said the police team went to the Indian embassy to get a warrant issued by a court and other documents attested and laid down by Thai rules. But by then Chhota Rajan was released by the Bangkok police. The don is not wanted for any offence in Thailand.

The police team pointed out that he even though his passport was genuine it was under a false name, Vijay Daman, and hence he

should not be allowed to leave Thailand. Apparently, the passport was issued in Mumbai.

It is learnt that the Thai police has permitted the Mumbai police team to question Chhota Rajan who is still under medical attention. The don has reportedly declined to speak to the Mumbai police citing health reasons. It is also learnt that the city police will seek to interrogate the attackers of Chhota Rajan who are in Thai police custody.

Sources said efforts were already underway to take Chhota Rajan out of Thailand to a secret destination.

Meanwhile, top aides of Chhota Rajan like Guru Satam and Ravi Poojari and his financiers have already moved into the Thai capital to ensure his safety in view of the threat by Chhota Shakeel, a top aide of Dawood Ibrahim, to track him down and kill him.

Sources said the Centre, which had in the past used Chhota Rajan to elimi-

nate ISI agents in Kathmandu, Mumbai and elsewhere, was deliberately going soft on the don. There is a suggestion of a quid pro quo between him and the Centre. "I will not be surprised if central agencies are helping him in return for services rendered by him in the past, though I am sceptical about how useful he is to the government at this juncture in view of his poor health," a senior police official said.

Agencies add from Bangkok: Chhota Rajan will be a free man after his release papers are signed, Thai immigration police chief Hemaraj Thereethai told journalists. A visa case against him had been closed after he paid a fine of 500 baht (Rs 500) as directed by a court last Tuesday. Rajan alias Vijay Kadam is free to go wherever he wants to, the commissioner said. Rajan's lawyer Sirichai Piyaphichetkul said the gangster will leave Thailand very soon.



Chhota Rajan

THE LOST DON

- Central govt. is accused of dilly-dallying about clearance of police team
- Officers land in Bangkok after 9 a.m. deadline on Thursday for Rajan's release
- Thai govt. allows Rajan's interrogation; don refuses to meet Indian team

THE TIMES OF INDIA

6 OCT 2000

Rajan freed, leaves Thailand

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MUMBAI, Oct. 5. — A three-member police team which left for Bangkok today will come back empty-handed, for their quarry, Chhota Rajan, has fled to an unknown destination.

This comes as a slap in the face of the Indian government which kept dragging its feet in asking the Thai authorities for Rajan's extradition.

Highly-placed police sources said the external affairs ministry had not given Mumbai police the permission to bring the gangster back. The police team learnt on arrival that the Thai government had released Chhota Rajan, who had flown out of the country at 9 a.m.

The Thai government had held out a strange three-day deadline

for the Indian government to ask for his extradition. Police sources say it is unusual for a government to get pro-active in this manner and suspect an underworld conspiracy to ensure that Rajan is in the hands of the Indian government.

Though the Indian government may have been understandably reluctant to rise to the bait, police say the episode has created a negative impression. Asked why the police team had been despatched to Bangkok at the height of the controversy, Mr D Sivanathan, joint commissioner of police (crime), told **The Statesman** that they had gone there to study the scene of the crime. Since Rajan had fled, there was no question on staying back to interrogate him.

Asked why the MEA had not cleared the application for extradition, Mr MR Patil, principal secretary (home), "the police would not go there if the MEA had not cleared it." He refused to elaborate on the consequences of Rajan's escape.

Rajan is wanted in 17 criminal offences in Mumbai. He was shot at on 15 September in Bangkok by six goons suspected to belong to Chhota Sha-keel's gang. Four men involved in the attack were arrested by the Thai police later. Three of them are Pakistanis and one is a Thai national.

Rajan was then held in custody by Thai police for entering Thailand under the fake name of Vijay Daman and released on bail of 500 baht, around Rs 450.

THE STATESMAN

6 OCT 2000

6 OCT 2000

Chhota Rajan still in Thailand

HD-1

By Amit Baruah

8/10

SINGAPORE, OCT. 7. In a change of tack, Thai authorities have "held back" the Indian underworld boss, Chhota Rajan, officials familiar with the case said from Bangkok today.

Though they did not use the word "arrested", the officials maintained that the Thai authorities, after agreeing to let Rajan go to a destination of his choice, had now changed their mind.

It is clear that after saying on Thursday that he was a free man, the arrival of the Mumbai police team seems to have altered their approach.

The exact role and scope of the Mumbai police team is not known. However, if Rajan is to be extradited to India, then a formal request from the Ministry of External Affairs to the Thai Government is required. So far, the officials said, no such request had been received.

The Rajan affair is getting curiouser and curiouser by the day. The repeated reference in New Delhi to the absence of an extradition treaty between Thailand and India is a red herring — if Bangkok is willing to entertain a request for extradition, then why is New Delhi hesitant in making one?

Another aspect is the lack of transparency. Given the possible links Rajan has with Indian intelligence agencies, the near absence of transparency can only lead to greater media speculation.

An AFP report from Bangkok said today that Rajan had not been formally arrested by the Thai police. "He is waiting to be deported from the country. (The Thai) police have not arrested him because the Indian Embassy up until now have certified that his

passport is genuine," it quoted an official as saying. "Only the three policemen from Mumbai are contesting that his passport is a forgery. If they submit a written document to back their allegations we can arrest him, but at this time he is not under arrest," the report added.

Home Ministry clarifies on extradition

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 7. The Union Home Ministry today denied reports that there was any delay on its part for seeking the extradition of Chhota Rajan from Bangkok and blamed the Maharashtra Government for failing to send the required papers.

In a statement here, the Home Ministry said, "On September 29, the CBI wrote to the Maharashtra Government requesting that the necessary extradition papers may be sent. The papers have not been received as yet from the State Government," the Home Ministry said. "The Maharashtra Government had made a request for grant of permission to send a police team to Bangkok. The Government granted the necessary clearance. The Thai Government was also informed through our Embassy in Bangkok that a police team was being despatched and that they should detain Rajan on the basis of the Red Corner Notice. The team reached Bangkok on October 5 and are carrying out necessary verification and interrogation. It is clear that the Government of India have been extremely concerned and prompt in the matter," it claimed.

THE HINDU

10 OCT 1988

Malaysia sees India as important player at global level

By Amit Baruah

JOHOR BAHRU (MALAYSIA), OCT. 8. India has a role to play not just in regional affairs, but also at the global level. "Countries like Malaysia see India as an important international player," the Malaysian Foreign Minister, Syed Hamid Albar, told *The Hindu* in an exclusive interview today.

Mr. Hamid, who will be in New Delhi tomorrow for the second meeting of the India-Malaysia Joint Commission spread over three days, spoke of the "historical linkages" between the two countries, the need to "deepen" the bilateral relationship and develop a "smart partnership" in the economic field.

The Minister was candid enough to concede that other commitments had held up the meeting of the Joint Commission for eight long years. The first and only meeting of the panel had taken place in 1992, after the then Prime Minister, Mr. V. P. Singh, visited Kuala Lumpur in 1990, though there had been Prime Ministerial visits in 1995 and 1996.

"I think the problem of having a mechanism of the joint commission is that as time goes by you establish a bilateral relationship with so many countries... and at a regional and multilateral level there are so many meetings in which each country is involved... it (the

Commission's meeting) was long overdue. That is the reason why I decided we should revive the Joint Commission," Mr. Hamid said.

The Minister, who is expected to sign a trade and cultural exchange agreement with his Indian counterpart, Mr. Jaswant Singh, said India was one of ASEAN's "finest dialogue partners".

"I think that Malaysia as the new country coordinator (in place of Singapore) will be able to continue (the relationship with ASEAN) and look at other areas to... deepen the relationship to the benefit of both sides," the 56-year-old Minister stated.

"There should be mutual benefit and I think India understands ASEAN very well and we would also like to take advantage of India's advance in certain areas in technology... information technology and certain areas of education and training," Mr. Hamid said.

The Foreign Minister said there were no "outstanding matters" between India and Malaysia that could make the relationship difficult. "There is a lot of understanding and goodwill on both sides. India has an important role to play not only in our regional affairs, but also in global affairs. Countries like Malaysia see India as an important international player and I think countries in ASEAN would

able, the United Nations itself, to decide on the (new) structure... some numbers have been floated around or talked about, but I think it will take a long, long time... definitely you look at India, you look at Japan..."

The Minister said "all this" had to be worked out, adding that big countries like India had a role to play, but whether it was through a permanent seat or otherwise would have to be followed through.

Asked about India's massive trade imbalance with Malaysia (trade in 1999 stood at \$ 2.7 billions; with Indian exports totalling \$ 500 millions and India being a net importer of palm oil and crude oil from Malaysia), Mr. Hamid said India should market itself better in Malaysia.

The Minister, who has vast experience of working in the corporate sector, said: "I think India used to be very active in Malaysia. We would like to create a better balance (of trade)... the Malaysian market is fairly open and I think India should look at the opportunities — what type of products they can sell or even countertrade."

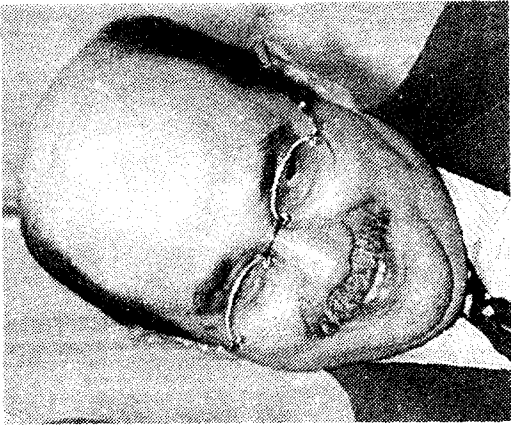
The trade gap, he said, was not because India didn't have a product range

motion. "There is a lot of Malaysian interest in investing in India... in taking part in projects and I am sure on the Indian side there should be an equal interest in how we can develop a smart partnership between our two private sectors especially," he said.

On the economic trends in the ASEAN region, the Minister said the area had come out of the 1997-98 crisis. "I think we would consider that we are out of the woods. But this does not mean we should be complacent because we think there are still dangers, pitfalls and shortcomings to be looked at so that there is no repeat of the financial or economic crisis."

"In the case of Malaysia, we think that globalisation is here to stay but let us try to create a fair and equitable system for everyone — the developing as well as the developed world. The international financial architecture still needs a lot of reform and we also have got some instability — what is happening in the southern Philippines... in Indonesia and some other areas within ASEAN."

To a question on Indonesia, the Foreign Minister stated that instability or law and order problems in that country would have negative implications not just for Indonesia but for the region as a



Syed Hamid Albar

like their relationship (with India) to be mutually beneficial to ASEAN with India playing its role in the international sphere," he said.

On India's quest for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, Mr. Hamid said: "At present, we haven't taken a view because we know the issue of the permanent seat in Malaysia is a very complex one."

Chhota Rajan deportation to take time

H BULA DEVI
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 11. -- Chhota Rajan's deportation may not come easy and may take longer than what one expects.

The ministry of external affairs is running against time now. Sources said it's not clear how long the court and the government in Thailand would take to allow Rajan's extradition. Moreover, the ministry is also worried that if Rajan plans to appeal against the extradition, it might take more time than expected.

"Before we send the extradition request to the Thai government, we want to be doubly sure that all proof to substantiate charges against him are in place to avoid embarrassment if the Thai government rejects the request on the ground of lack of evidence," said a ministry official.

The Mumbai Police has collected some documents against Rajan. But the MEA has asked them for more documents. It is hopeful that by next week it will be in a position to draft the extradition request and send the formal request to the Thai government.

The MEA, for the first time today, officially broke the silence over the extradition request. All along, the controversy over the "inordinate delay" to send the request, with the home ministry and the Maharashtra government blaming each other on the matter, the MEA had maintained that there was total coordination between itself and the state government.

Today, the MEA spokesman said the "documents related to Rajan's extradition from Thailand had been received by the government from Mumbai Police on 9 October. These documents are being examined from the legal and other points of view."

Maharashtra deputy chief minister Mr Chhagan Bhujbal said the state government had suggested that Rajan's passport be seized to prevent him from leaving Thailand, to help his deportation.

Rajan cannot be extradited since there is no extradition treaty with Thailand. And if the process is undertaken, it would take a long time. Deportation is thus the only way out for which his passport would have to be impounded, Mr Bhujbal said, adds SNS from Mumbai. He said he has asked the joint commissioner of police (crime) Mr D Sivanandhan, to camp in Delhi to ensure that all the documents required for his deportation are made available to the Centre. Mr Bhujbal said that even with countries like the UK with which India had an extradition treaty, it was not possible to secure the extradition of Nadeem, an accused in the Gulshan Kumar murder case.

Meanwhile, the Thai government has issued a fresh deadline till tomorrow to take back Chhota Rajan after the first one up to 5 October went unheeded by the Indian government.

THE STATESMAN

12 OCT 2000

India, Myanmar take stock of ties

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 18. India and Myanmar today took stock of their relationship and looked at ways to work together in the fields of security, energy and infrastructural development.

These discussions took place as part of foreign office consultations which were regularised between the two sides last year. The Myanmar side was represented by its Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Khin Maung Wing, while the Indian delegation was headed by the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Lalit Mansingh. India sees Myanmar as a land bridge to South East Asia. Not surprisingly, Myanmar is central to the India's "look east policy" revolving around closer integration with the region.

India and Myanmar are currently engaged in the construction of a strategic cross-border road link. The road from national highway 39 which terminates at More in Manipur is being extended to Tamu in Myanmar. From Tamu, it is being constructed to Kalemyo, a communication hub in central Myanmar. The construction of this road is part of a larger plan to bring India on the proposed Asia highway road map which will cover most of South East Asia.

Besides, the presence of this road can spin-off benefits on the security front. After the work is complete, both sides can send troops to smash cross-border insurgents who have acquired sanctuaries in Myanmar.

THE HINDU

19 OCT 2000

Goh wants India to open up further

By V. Jayanth HD-11

SINGAPORE, NOV. 11 The Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, said today that he would be taking up with his fellow leaders from South-East Asia this month, the idea of inviting India to the annual informal summit with ASEAN leaders.

In an informal dialogue with a select group of Indian journalists, Mr. Goh said he would put this idea in a friendly way to his colleagues at the coming summit in Singapore towards the end of the month.

Leaders of China, Japan and South Korea are already invited to this informal summit every year as part of the East Asian dialogue. Singapore would like to get India involved in this consultation process.

Mr. Goh said it would be mutually beneficial for ASEAN and India if the latter opened up its economy further to enhance the potential for economic cooperation in terms of both trade and investments.

On India's entry into APEC or ASEM, the Asia Pacific forum and the Asia-Europe meeting, the Prime Minister said APEC's membership was frozen for a decade since 1998 and ASEM had decided to spell out the criteria for its membership before taking in any more countries. Eight or nine countries had sought entry into this forum, which already had 25 members.

After hosting a lunch in honour of the visiting Indian President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, and holding delegation-level talks, Mr. Goh expanded on his favourite theme of Singapore playing a 'catalyst's role' in pushing India's reforms.

"India wants to be cautious in its opening

up, because it will hurt some sectors and have some political fallout. We can open your eyes and we cannot overwhelm your economy. Which is why we can be a good catalyst for your reforms and prove the value of Singapore for India," the Prime Minister explained.

He was looking forward to the work on the new task force on economic cooperation and envisaged that it could open new areas of partnership in tourism, civil aviation, property development, telecommunications and infrastructure. Since the Tourism Minister, Mr. Ananth Kumar, is here with the President, Mr. Goh discussed the framework for setting up a working group on tourism, perhaps within a month.

The Prime Minister said Singapore could identify the areas of interest in India for tourists from East Asia, and then work with Indian partners to develop the required facilities. Above all, more air services were needed to different parts of India to bring in more tourists. A lot of infrastructure had to be developed for all this. By bringing the tourist through Singapore, the City State would also benefit in this bargain.

Case for free trade pact

He said the President's visit had further strengthened bilateral ties and he had already visited India thrice in six years. He was ready to go again when it was necessary. Mr. Goh was keen on pushing for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India and argued it would be a good experiment for India in its phased process of opening up its economy. Here again, there would be a catalyst's role for Singapore, with significant advantages too.

Mr. Goh denied suggestions that Singapore

was focusing only on Karnataka, but added that having established its IT park near Bangalore, it was committed to making a success of the project. Investors were also looking for opportunities in both Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, which were equally keen on joint ventures.

He noted that China would remain a major attraction to Singapore investors for at least another 10 years, till there was some saturation in that market. And if India opened up its economy further, the gap would be closed.

Answering a question on defence cooperation, the Prime Minister said, "we are quite satisfied with the generous facilities India has offered. We are trying to use all those facilities. The Naval exercises are continuing and piracy on the seas will emerge as a major challenge both for littoral States in this region as well as internationally."

Software pact signed

PTI reports:

The National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom) has signed a software pact with Singapore to facilitate investment, including venture capital funding.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed last night between Mr. Dewang Mehta, president, Nasscom, Mr. Wilson Tan, chief of the Singapore Information Technology Federation (SITF). The MoU is part of the agenda chalked out by India to increase business cooperation with Singapore.

"India-Singapore trade in software and services is expected to go up exponentially and reach an annual revenue of Rs. 5,000 crores over the next five years," Mr. Mehta said.

THE HINDU

12 NOV 2000

Singapore wants India to play more active role

Pramit Pal Chaudhuri
Singapore, November 13

XI-17
A
DURING HIS State visit to Singapore, the Indian President K.R. Narayanan was repeatedly told that Singapore would like India to take a more active economic and political role in the region.

At almost every opportunity, from the Singapore President to the Foreign Minister, the island-nation's officials stressed India's strategic role in Asia. Mr Narayanan was cautious. He preferred to talk of stability rather than strategy.

At the conclusion of his visit, however, he said India was "supportive" of Southeast Asia's "security concerns". There are two

elements to India's strategic role in Southeast Asia. The first is China. When Singaporean officials told the Indian President they wanted India to be "a balancing factor in the region" no one doubted that the Beijing was the subtext.

Earlier, the Singaporean President S.R. Nathan said that whatever the "new or equilibrium or geopolitical balance" that emerges in Asia, "India will be an important player". This was echoed by the Singaporean Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar. With the present shifts in great power relationships, he said, India would play an important role.

New Delhi insists it is not in the business of playing counter to China. At his presidential banquet speech, Mr Narayanan said that Chinese and Indian civilisations met in Southeast Asia "in mutual understanding and in peaceful coexistence". The Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, after a recent visit to Vietnam and Laos, stated his visit was not directed at any third country.

However, Beijing has stepped up diplomatic activity in the area. The Chinese President Jiang Zemin is on a week-long three-nation tour of Southeast Asia - the first by a Chinese president since the 1960s.

Singapore is not the only Asian country encouraging India to show its flag in the area. Malaysia recently revived a moribund defence agreement with India. Indian warships and Defence Minister George Fernandes had preceded Singh to Vietnam.

Singapore is taking a long-term view of India's strategic potential in the region. India still lacks economic clout. Even Sino-phobic Vietnam does \$2 billion worth of trade with China and only \$150 million with India. New Delhi is reluctant to think beyond the Straits of Malacca. As Mr Narayanan admitted, Singaporeans had asked India to "maintain interest in the region" and not to "go back" on its present policy of re-engaging the region.

Southeast Asian Region

Realise economic potential, Singapore tells India

By V. Jayanth

ON BOARD PRESIDENTIAL AIRCRAFT, NOV. 13, Singapore wants India to realise its "full economic potential" and play a bigger role in the region as a whole, the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, said today.

Speaking to journalists on board the Air India aircraft while returning after a four-day visit to the city-state, the President said leaders there told him they would like to see India play a major economic, commercial and political role to act as a "balancing factor in the region".

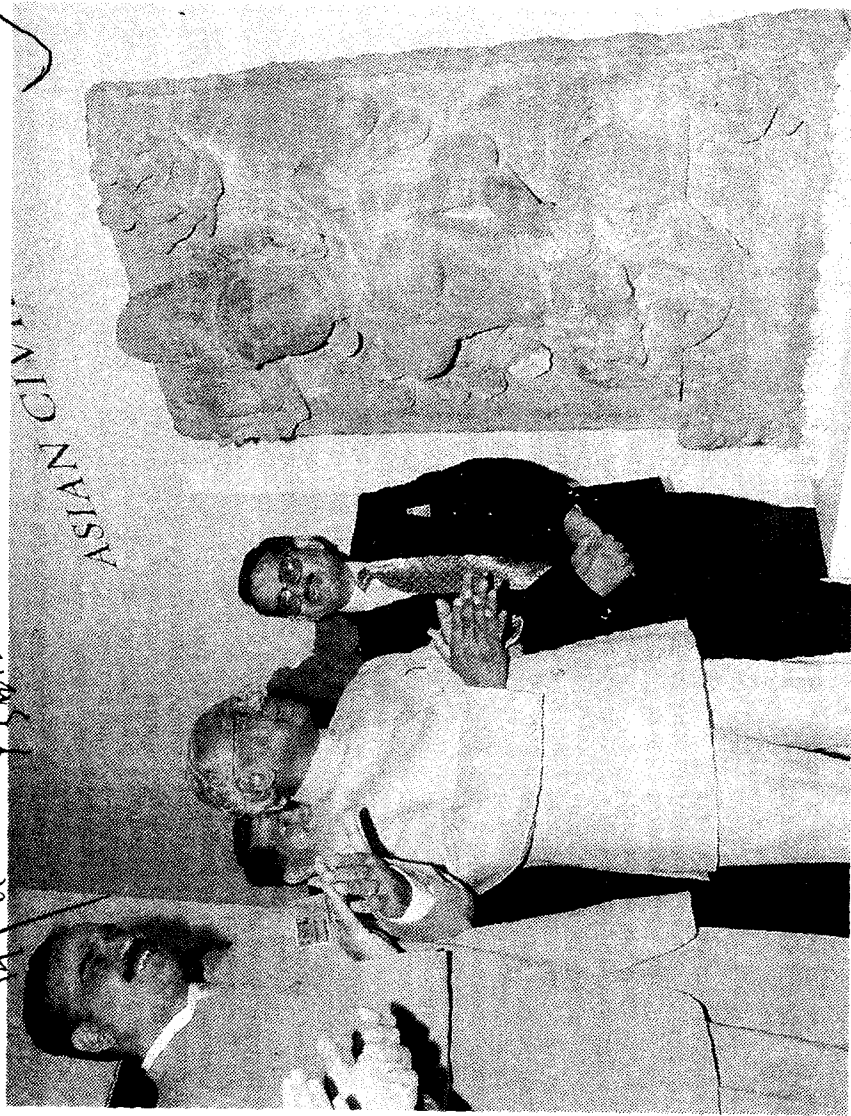
It was in this context that Singapore wanted India to speed up economic reforms, so that it could achieve its potential.

"The Senior Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, was frank about it. He was concerned about the slow pace of the liberalisation process, urging us to go ahead faster. This is his well known view. I told him that we are working on the basis of a consensus and there is a stable Government in the country today. We can hasten reforms in some sectors, but we have to be careful and cautious in others. I explained the whole position to him. They fully understand the problems and the situation here," he noted.

Mr. Lee advocated a "change in the mindset" to make the reforms work. Foreign investors wanted to cut corners, avoid delays and get started without delays.

The liberalisation process should sink into the general psyche. "It is a factual statement I thought. But I also told him that stability and forward movement (on reforms) are a difficult balance to establish in India."

On the concept of a Free Trade Area with Singapore, the Presi-



The President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, unveiling a stone sculpture at the Asian civilisation museum in Singapore on Monday. — PTI

dent said, "we are not hostile to the idea. They are keen. It has to be examined by the Government of India in all its implications. We can certainly consider its feasibility. All other factors have to be considered in totality and not suddenly, or in isolation."

He said Singapore's leaders conveyed their disappointment on the liberalisation in the civil aviation sector.

But now that they were bidding

for a stake in Air India, there was still hope.

Answering questions on regional issues, the President said Singapore was keen on getting India to participate in the ASEAN summit of leaders. This was something that they must decide by consensus, but India was equally keen to enhance its relations with South-east Asia.

to see India maintain its interest in the region.

He saw no immediate prospect of India's entry into the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC), as the membership had been frozen. However, India had conveyed its continued interest to enlarge and enhance its interaction with that region.

Discussion on Kashmir

Asked whether Kashmir was discussed, Mr. Narayanan said, "it figured peripherally. They did not raise it and I think that is good in itself. They are not unduly concerned."

At a brief function in the Asian Civilisation Museum in Singapore this morning, the President handed over three ancient artefacts under the bilateral "loaning" agreement. They would be part of the museum's South Asian section.

The three sculptures were: (1) an armed Ganesha seated on a lotus throne, holding a tooth, axe, tender plant and a pot of sweets. It is a 12th Century piece from the Hayasala School of Art in Halebid, Karnataka; (2) a dancing Shiva in all his glory, also of the 12th century and from Halebid; (3) a partially mutilated goddess belonging to the 11th century stylistically from the Paramara school of art in Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh. The artefacts belong to the Archeological Survey of India.

The President and his wife, Mrs. Usha Narayanan, were given a warm farewell by the authorities at the VIP terminal of Changi airport this afternoon. Air India's Harsha Vardhana, Boeing 747, landed in Delhi around 3.30 p.m. and Mr. Narayanan was ceremonially welcomed back home.

Myanmar too close to ignore

Pramit Pal Chaudhuri
New Delhi, November 16

THE ARRIVAL of the 16-member Myanmarese delegation in the capital on Friday is tangible evidence that New Delhi recognizes it must deal with Yangon, irrespective of its domestic circumstances. The delegation leader, General Maung Aye, is number two in Myanmar's ruling junta.

Prominent Indian sympathizers of Myanmar's pro-democracy movement have held their tongues. A vocal defence minister, George Fernandes, will not join the army chief and home minister in calling on Gen Maung. But the foreign ministry points out the defence minister does not meet every foreign visitor.

Rashtrapati Bhavan said the first lady, Mrs Usha Narayanan, would be present when Gen Maung meets the president on Friday. As per protocol, the vice-president will host a banquet for the visitors. Mrs Narayanan, an ethnic Burmese, is close to imprisoned dissident, Ms Aung San Suu Kyi.

India's Myanmar policy took a leisurely dozen years to evolve from moralizing to engagement. This is only partly because of sympathy for Ms Suu Kyi. The snail's pace of India's engagement is more about failing to prioritize interests regarding Myanmar and being overly influenced by the West.

India's Myanmar interests are threefold. One, getting Yangon's help against the insurgency which infest the 16,000-kilometre border. The past five years have seen a number of successful joint military operations against separatists. New Delhi has helped Yangon against Kachins and others.

Myanmar has reciprocated against Nagas.

Two, making up for lost time on the economic front. Myanmar can be a major supplier of timber, pulses and gems. It is a potential market for Indian products. Myanmar manufactures so little it imports Cambodian goods. India opened its border for trade with Myanmar in 1995 - four years after China. From the trans-Asian highway to the Mekong Valley project, "Myanmar is our land-bridge to Southeast Asia," says the foreign office spokesperson. India is helping construct the Tamu-Kalemayo road in Myanmar.

Three, concern that isolating Myanmar has created a diplomatic vacuum being filled by China. Well before India, other Asian countries engaged Myanmar to counter this. Fortunately, Yangon's xenophobia makes it wary even of Beijing.

New Delhi has been slow to accept that slamming doors on a non-hostile neighbour has few plus points. When India isolated Myanmar post-1988, it was moved by moral zeal. "A hangover of the 1960s and 1970s," a former Indian diplomat termed it.

But the junta showed no signs of buckling. Around 1990, New Delhi found Chinese radar facilities on Myanmar's Cocos Islands. The Indian army also pressed for cooperation with Yangon. India bent enough to initiate a dialogue in 1994. But New Delhi sent confusing signals: in 1995 it awarded Ms Suu Kyi the Nehru prize. Isolation was further discredited when Myanmar joined the ranks of the ASEAN in 1997. The MEA says relations will now be driven by "national interest": belated recognition that Myanmar is too close for neglect.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 NOV 2000

Policy on Myanmar unchanged: Jaswant

Vijay Dutt
London, November 16

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS Minister Jaswant Singh, at the conclusion of his visit here for Ministerial-level talks with the British Government, echoed the words of Foreign Secretary Robin Cook in describing the Indo-UK ties as "the best ever".

Addressing a crowded Press conference in India House, Mr Singh touched on various regional and international issues. He was specifically asked about India's policy on

Myanmar in view of the General's visit to Delhi and on Indo-Pak relations.

Mr Singh refuted that the visit of the Myanmar General to India in any way diluted India's "encouragement to democracy" in the country. He said that ASEAN took steps to take Myanmar as a full member and so India was only trying to draw "the country into the larger global community".

During his three-day stay here, Mr Singh met Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and Defence Secretary Geoffrey Hoon, apart from

other Ministers like Minister in Foreign and Commonwealth Office Peter Hain, who is scheduled to visit India from November 20.

He also had "fruitful" talks with Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon. The CMAG "activities" and various concerns with regard to Fiji and Pakistan came up for discussion at the meeting between them.

The Indo-Pak relations in the context of the situation in the region were discussed with Mr Cook, said Mr Singh, in response to a question from a Pak journalist.

"I do not carry a scale with me to weigh the Indo-Pak relations" he quipped, it was touched during discussion on developments in the region. "Like on Kargil conflict, regarding of the Indian Airlines hijack".

Mr Singh said that notes were exchanged about developments in Pakistan. The talks were confined or focussed around Jammu and Kashmir, he pointed out adding all the issues that were discussed concerned global community.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 11 1997

Re-engaging Southeast Asia

By V. Jayanth

WHEN THE former Prime Minister, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, fashioned what he called a 'Look East' policy to bring back into focus the centuries old ties with countries in East and Southeast Asia, he was in fact preparing for a platform of 're-engagement' with a familiar region. Unfortunately, because of the Cold War and its fallout, there was a period of separation or at least lack of warmth. Over the past five or six years, this has changed dramatically. With the arrival of what is being heralded as the 'new economy', India is back in the reckoning and much sought after by its eastern neighbours.

Successive Governments have added value to this new partnership and the Foreign Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, has managed to spend as much time in the East as he does in the West, to balance the equations. When the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, chose to visit Singapore from November 9 to 13, he became the first Indian Head of State to do so in nearly three full decades. It was not just a state visit or show of friendship. There were substantive talks with the Singapore leaders, who were convinced that India was firmly tied to its Look East policy. Mr. Narayanan called it a 're-engagement' phase in India's approach to Southeast Asia.

The first phase was the great Indian trader, who went in search of markets and established bases and lasting ties in the region. This was also followed by some conquests and incursions by Indian Kings, basically from the south. The second and more critical engagement with the region was in the pre and post World War II phase, when many of them struggled to obtain their freedom from colonial rule. India emerged as a role model; a friend, philosopher and guide to these countries. This was followed by a new partnership that shaped into the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which brought together newly independent and developing countries under one banner.

There was a period of aberration, in the 1970s and later, when India and Southeast Asia took totally different positions on some of the regional problems, notably Indochina. But it was the Colombo conference and India's involvement with Cambodia that ultimately resulted in the

Paris agreement of 1991 and brought an end to the painful era of genocide and 'occupation'. A third and totally new chapter began after that, when India began to open up its economy and the Soviet Union collapsed, bringing down with it the Cold War equations. It was now possible, even imperative for India and Southeast Asia to move closer and start addressing bilateral, regional and global issues together as Asians and developing economies. This mutual respect and interest led to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) taking India as a full dialogue partner from 1996. There has been no looking back since.

As Singapore's President, Mr. S. R. Nathan,

Asian system that has stood the test of time. Even at the expense of being "uncertain or unstable at times", no one can fault Indian democracy. In fact, many Southeast Asian leaders complain that India suffers from an "excess of democracy and individual freedoms". But the region is now coming to terms with democracy. The denouement in Indonesia should be an eye-opener to the rest of the countries, which should now start working on an increased pace of democratisation at a 'comfortable pace' and a system that can suit their nation or style.

Mr. Narayanan for one tried to convince a group of Singapore intellectuals that Non-Alignment was still relevant. All that

For India to emerge as the stabilising factor in the region, it must first realise its full economic potential... Once this happens, it will automatically become a power to reckon with.

an, noted in his banquet speech in honour of his Indian counterpart: "Our relationship is broad-based and multi-dimensional. Apart from the traditional links of history and culture, and in the political and educational spheres, we have a very substantive and growing economic relationship, with trade, investment and economic cooperation blossoming". He said India was poised to "take off in the new economy", distinguishing itself in fields as diverse as agriculture, aeronautics, satellite telecommunications, medicine and computer software. "Western analysts have forecast that India should become the fourth largest economy in the world by the year 2020, barring the unforeseen."

That sets the stage for the broadening and deepening of India's ties with Southeast Asia. What has India to offer to that region that its western allies or friends cannot? Primarily, New Delhi must be seen as "a friend and neighbour", who does not force his views or prescribe solutions, but is ready to work together and address common problems. Even in the sensitive area of democracy and human rights, which have become the passwords for the West, India provides a stable and very

play a "larger role" in the region and emerge as the "stabilising factor or influence". One cannot possibly expect the same degree of warmth from all 10 members of ASEAN, but the regional forum operates on the basis of a consensus (meaning a majority view).

For India to emerge as the stabilising factor in the region, it must first realise its full economic potential. And to achieve that, it can learn a few lessons from its eastern neighbours. Political parties in India must learn and decide to keep politics out of economic policy so that the country can accelerate growth, contain poverty and become the economic power that it can be, given its one billion plus population and potential for growth. When it realises that potential, India will automatically become a power to reckon with on the political and diplomatic fronts. This cannot be done by the Government alone. In the new economy, it is the private sector which calls the tune and it is Indian industry which must graduate, set out and become regional as well as global players.

As Singapore's Foreign Minister, Prof. S. Jayakumar, put it: "What we can be certain is the fact that India will play an important role in the new equilibrium that will emerge... India has also re-emerged as a diplomatic player on the world stage. President Clinton's visit to India and Prime Minister Vajpayee's return visit were heralded as great successes. President Narayanan himself paid a historic visit to China in May. Added to these political and foreign policy triumphs, India's economy is also taking off. India's strategic importance therefore cannot be over-emphasised".

Keeping national politics out of economics and foreign policy holds the key to India's emergence as a major global power in the new millennium. That means evolving a national, political consensus on these prime sectors and getting the private sector to look outwards, become competitive and emerge as Indian multinational companies. Instead of always looking for investors, they must also scout for investment opportunities in the developing economies and register their presence. A vibrant economy, a stable Government and a dynamic but friendly foreign policy are considered the essentials to attain that status.

9/2/98

THE HINDU
17 NOV 2000

Better ties with Myanmar spell better security for India

By Manoj Joshi

NEW DELHI: Talk of the country's 'neighbours', and the last name that comes to mind is Myanmar, with whom India shares a highly active 1,600-km long border. For most part, it's a practically unpoliced border, through which insurgents, arms, drugs, and fake currency pour into India and disrupt the security and tenor of life in the entire North-East.

In giving a red-carpet reception to General Maung Aye, the No. 2 man in the ruling junta, the government is hoping to change this situation with some assistance from the Myanmar authorities. New Delhi hopes the visit will help mitigate the bad vibes between it and Yangon that arose from the crackdown

on pro-democracy forces by Myanmar's armed forces in 1988, and set their relations on a new track.

Official optimism is based on the fact that ever since 1999 when India stepped up its 'constructive engagement' with Myanmar, there has been a visible payoff in terms of the pressure put by the Myanmar Army on the Indian insurgent groups sheltering

there. Visits to Myanmar by Army chief Gen V.P. Malik and home secretary Kamal Pande this year, as well as an import of 50,000 tonnes of rice from Myanmar have set the stage for Gen Maung's visit.

New Delhi's policy towards Myanmar has drawn predictable criticism from activists who support Aung San Suu Kyi, the detained

pro-democracy leader. However, beyond a limit India cannot allow its state interests to subserve its commitment to democracy, especially in a situation where its own security is affected.

To convince the Myanmarers of India's serious intent, there is some house-cleaning to be done. First,

New Delhi must convey to the

Generals in Yangon that while New Delhi values democracy, it unambiguously recognises the State Peace and Development Council as the government of Myanmar. Second, it must assure the Myanmarers that India will not allow any insurgent movement to base itself in India. India's support for some dubious groups in this area has brought little by way

of returns and has instead clouded its relations with Myanmar. Third, that while Myanmar pro-democracy refugees are given asylum in India, they will not be permitted to conduct any political activity that will prejudice Myanmar's security in any way.

NEWS ANALYSIS

THE TIMES OF INDIA

18 NOV 2000

Myanmar to continue anti-Naga rebels help

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 17

WHILE HELPING India fight Naga insurgency, the Myanmar's army destroyed five National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang faction) camps this year. Home Minister L.K. Advani said today that the Myanmar Army had suffered casualties in the process but will continue operations to wipe out the remaining camps.

The visiting vice-chairman of the junta, General Maung Aye, and the Home Minister, who held a meeting here today, discussed at length the subject of more effective co-ordination in fighting insurgencies in their countries. Advani also offered assistance for up keep of the tomb of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, in Yangon. Turning down the offer, Gen Aye said it was being looked after well by a committee appointed for the purpose.

Earlier in the day, the General was accorded a ceremonial welcome at Rashtrapati Bhavan. The General also visited Raj Ghat and paid his respects to Mahatma Gandhi. Former Army chief Gen

V.P. Malik also called on him. In the evening, he attended a banquet hosted by Vice-President Krishan Kant, where an agreement on extending the Indian line of credit for Myanmar was signed.

Speaking at a meeting organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry, General Maung said Myanmar had attracted around \$ 7 billion in foreign direct investment since the country opened its doors to the world. Indian investment was only 1.1 per cent and there was much scope for improvement, particularly in the agriculture sector, he said.

Trade and economic co-operation between the two countries have been growing steadily. The trade turn over, which was just \$ 13 million in 1980-81, touched \$ 194 million in 1999-2000. The balance of trade is in Myanmar's favour as India is the single biggest market for its exports.

A Ministry of External Affairs spokesman said India and Myanmar were negotiating a bilateral investment protection and promotion treaty. The two countries were looking forward to joint projects in the hydel power, road and other infrastructure sectors.



General Maung Aye of Myanmar and his wife being welcomed by President K R Narayanan at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Friday. Photo: Virendra Singh

India, Myanmar discuss ways to expand tourism industry

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV.17. India and Myanmar today discussed ways to jointly expand their tourism industry as part of an effort to shore up their economic ties.

In an interaction with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Myanmar's visiting Vice-Chairman of state Peace and Development Organisation, General Maung Aye, said that tourism authorities in Myanmar and India could devise a common Buddhist pilgrim tour package. The package could include visits to Bodh Gaya as well as Mandalay in Myanmar.

Lack of communication links between the two countries and internally in Myanmar may hamper such projects. Nevertheless, India and Myanmar are looking at building new road connections. The 160 km-long Tamu-Kalemyo road will be completed later this year which will link Myanmar and Manipur. According to the visiting foreign minister, Mr. Win Aung, who also participated in the discussion, Myanmar was keen to revive road connections between Calcutta and Yangon.

Besides tourism, cross-border links are vital for pushing trade. Both countries are undertaking the Kaladan project. This project involves the transportation of cargo along the Kaladan river to the Bay of Bengal. This river has been surveyed for this purpose.

Myanmar's top leaders who were present at the CII meeting, however, observed that Indian investment in Myanmar did not compare well with the economic involvement of countries belonging to the ASEAN.

India, nevertheless, was now involved in a hydroelectric project in Myanmar. The Tamanthi hydel project on the banks of the Chindwin river envisages generation of 110 MWs of power, 75 per cent of which will be shared with India.

Cooperation in select areas of agriculture is yet another focal area. The CII on its part has proposed the forging of a growth triangle involving North Bengal, the North-east States and Myanmar.

THE HINDU

18 NOV 2000

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India, Myanmar hold talks on security relations

By Atul Aneja

NEW DELHI, NOV. 17. After years of low-key engagement, India and Myanmar today broke fresh ground to forge a new security and business relationship.

Both sides began a high profile interaction this morning. The visiting Vice-Chairman of Myanmar's State Peace and Development Organisation, Gen. Maung Aye, was welcomed at the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, a ceremony usually reserved for visits by heads of State or Government.

The visiting Myanmarese leader, who was received by the Vice-President, Mr. Krishan Kant, held detailed discussions with the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, revolving mainly around ways to counter insurgency in the sensitive Myanmar-India border areas.

India is keen that Naga insurgents are denied sanctuary in

Myanmar and their nexus with insurgent groups operating independently there, broken. Myanmar, on its part, is seeking India's intervention to deny arms and ammunition to its insurgents.

Specifically, the Indian Navy can be involved in disrupting the gun-running route used by insurgents in Myanmar. According to reports, gun-runners usually transit arms along the Andaman Sea before transferring them first to Changmai in Thailand. These weapons are then sent over land to insurgent strongholds in Myanmar via Cox Bazaar in Bangladesh. Assertion by the Navy in the Andamans can, therefore, be critical in curbing this trade.

India, on its part, may also benefit from Myanmar's assistance for promoting negotiations with key militant groups in the Northeast. It will be in India's interest, for instance, if Myanmar can influence the NSCN(I)(M) faction to

persist with its ongoing negotiations with India to resolve the Naga question. Myanmar has reportedly established a good rapport with the Karen Independence Organisation (KIO), a Myanmarese group which operates from its soil, but which regularly liaisons with the NSCN(I)(M).

The Home Minister, in response to queries this morning acknowledged that Myanmar was already assisting in counter-insurgency exercise. The Myanmarese army, he said, had helped smash five camps of the Khapleng group of the NSCN. The Indo-Myanmar security agenda, however, goes beyond concerns in the northeast. India, for instance, has concerns about the military relationship between Myanmar and China. Analysts here point out that India is looking at the Yangoon-Beijing security relationship realistically.

THE HINDU

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Burma, India explore ways to improve ties

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Nov. 20: Keeping the controversial issue of democracy on the back burner, India explored the possibilities of improving economic ties, border trade and jointly countering insurgency with Burma.

The visiting vice chairman of Burma's ruling State Peace and Development Council Gen. Maung Aye met Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and external affairs minister Jaswant Singh on Monday.

New Delhi justified playing host to the second most prominent member of Burma's military junta, by saying that while India supports democratic governments, it does not interfere in the internal matters of other

countries.

With this background, New Delhi and Rangoon chalked out ways to strengthen their ties. While India has agreed to extend \$15 million credit to Burma for sourcing industrial and electrical equipment from this country, Rangoon offered to cooperate with India in the power sector and supply of natural gas.

Mr Jaswant Singh, in his meeting with Gen. Maung Aye, called for enhancing border trade and improving infrastructure. The security issues and drug smuggling also figured in the talks.

New Delhi appreciated Burma's support in tackling cross border terrorism and other related problems including countering insurgent groups active in the region. Burma has

already assured India of full co-operation in fighting some of the insurgent groups in the north-eastern states and even busted five bases of Naga militants in its territory.

On the economic front, Gen. Maung Aye offered India to explore the hydel power potential in Burma. Gen. Aye asked India to involve itself in 750 MW Yeywa project. Mr Singh responded by saying that New Delhi can send a team of experts to Burma to study the feasibility of the project. The two sides also talked about other projects including Teamanthi hydro power project, Kaladin river navigation and setting up deep sea port in Burma.

Both Mr Vajpayee and Mr Singh reiterated India's commit-

ment to establishing closer political ties and deeper economic interaction with Burma. They said that the two countries had civilisational connectivities, a common cultural and religious heritage and geographical contiguity. For India, Burma is being viewed as an important partner as it is a member of the important ASEAN group. The two countries recently entered the Ganga-Mekong project which aims at enhancing ties between the two regions.

The two countries have supported each other on the international fora. Rangoon has appreciated India's positive approach to issues involving Burma at ILO. New Delhi had blocked an anti-Rangoon resolution being moved at the ILO.

THE ASIAN AGE

21 NOV 2000

Dealing with Myanmar need not imply a dilution of India's commitment to democracy

Sitting with the generals

BY J.N. DIXIT

THE RECENT visit of General Maung Aye, the Deputy Chief of the military Government of Myanmar, revived the debate about the advisability of India nurturing and expanding relations with Myanmar. General Maung led a 16-member delegation to Delhi and had extensive discussions with our Prime Minister, Minister for External Affairs and officials of the Ministries of Defence, Home Affairs and External Affairs.

This high-level visit is a continuation of the process which commenced in March 1992, when the then Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, took a decision to activate relations with Myanmar which were in a drift particularly after the Armed Forces High Command of Myanmar refused to hand over power to Aung San Suu Kyi.

It is to be remembered that in the initial period after India and Myanmar (then Burma) became independent, Indo-Myanmar relations were very close. Jawaharlal Nehru had visited Rangoon during 1945-46 and was a strong advocate of Burma's independence. His relations with Colonel Aung San — the founding President of Burma and father of Aung San Suu Kyi — and with the second Prime Minister, U Nu, were based on their historical experience against colonial rule and a conviction about convergence of mutual interests.

Indo-Burmese relations were negatively affected when General Ne Win was in power in Rangoon. There was no break in relations, but they were maintained at the formal level and there was not too much economic, political or technological cooperation in bilateral relations during this period. The only exception is the strong and vibrant link of Buddhism remaining unaffected by the disappearance of democracy from Myanmar.

Another factor which created distances between the two countries was the discrimination against people of Indian origin in Myanmar. Myanmar's refusal to become a member of the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement in its initial stages also contributed to a lack of depth in Indo-Myanmar relations. This situation characterised a profound contradiction in India's relations with one of its most important neighbours because, in terms of geo-strategic location, security considerations, availabil-

ty of markets and complementarity of mutual economic needs, India's relations with Myanmar, should have been multi-faceted and substantial.

The initial insularity of the Myanmar Government and India's ideological reservations about military regimes were at the root of this contradiction. Rajiv Gandhi tried to resolve this contradiction in the late Eighties. Some expansion took place in bilateral trade relations and a beginning was made in providing some defence supplies to Myanmar. Things went into a spin again when the military authorities refused to accept the electoral verdict of their people in 1990.

In any case, the V.P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar Governments were so enmeshed in domestic political uncertainties that they were not able to structure a cohesive foreign policy with a clear sense of priorities. It must be underlined that the Government of Myanmar dealt with India's critical reaction to their assuming power with sobriety and without any polemical reactions. Nor did they react to Indian public and media criticism or our Government's attitude by doing anything against India between 1989 and the beginning of 1991.

Important powers like the US, Britain, Germany and Japan tried to generate political pressure on the military regime of Myanmar to give up power to Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy. These nations also formally requested India to join their embassies in Rangoon to present a formal protest against the military regime for not respecting the results of the elections. These countries, however, were hypocritical in this exercise as they continued investing in Myanmar, carrying on their export trade with it while politically opposing the junta. While India did not join them, it did convey its disappointment at the negation of democracy in Myanmar through bilateral diplomatic channels.

One of the considerations which influenced India

to revive relations with Myanmar was the latter's geo-strategic importance for India. Myanmar abuts on our sensitive northeastern states and portions of Bangladesh. It shares an equally significant border with China. Thus, the northern frontiers of Myanmar constitute a tri-junction with Bangladesh, China and the eastern frontiers of India. Myanmar is also an important country lying on the rim of the Bay of Bengal. The southeastern coast of Myanmar is close enough to the Nicobar and Andaman islands. So developments in that region could affect our security interests in the Bay of Bengal.

India-Myanmar cooperation to counter narcotics, insurgency and security threats to our northeastern states were acknowledged as imperatives for our foreign policy. It was equally important to ensure that Myanmar does not become part of an exclusive area of influence of other powers in the region with whom India has uneasy relations (China, for instance). This is an objective which would be shared by the people and Governments of Myanmar also, with a view to maintaining their independence and freedom of options in dealing with their foreign policy and security concerns. It was, therefore, considered necessary to normalise relations with Myanmar regardless of the kind of government in power there.

The third factor was a sheer rational one. While India remains committed to democracy and related values, there was no reason for India to unilaterally assume responsibility of creating democracies in other countries. This had to be the choice and responsibility of the people of the country concerned.

Preliminary discussions were held between New Delhi and the Myanmar foreign office between February and August, 1992. I was a participant in these discussions, which ultimately led to the visit of the Vice-Foreign Minister of Myanmar, U Baswe, to India in August 1992. The Myanmar delegation made three points during this visit: one,

Myanmar respects India's commitment to democracy and hopes India would be patient about the revival of democracy in Myanmar; two, it acknowledged that security and political concerns existed which are shared by both countries (and, therefore, it was willing to cooperate with India in taking joint action to meet the security and strategic interests of both countries); three, Myanmar was willing to increase economic and technological cooperation with India.

Another issue that India was anxious about was the increasing strategic links between Myanmar and China. The Chinese had already built an all-weather road from Kunmin in China to Mandalay in Myanmar, which they were planning to extend to Yangon. There were also reports of the Myanmar Government providing some visiting and berthing facilities to the Chinese navy.

When these points were raised with the Myanmar authorities, they responded by saying that they would be ready to accept India's assistance in building up the transportation network in their country. They indicated that they would like India making the road from Imphal and Mandalay and then on to Yangon as a parallel to the Chinese road building activities. They denied any military facilities being given to China and added that they would be willing to give general facilities to the Indian Navy in their ports and on their coasts.

There have been visits of Home Secretaries, Drug Controllers and Ministers of Commerce between the two countries between 1993 and now. Myanmar joining ASEAN and ARF over the last five years adds to the legitimacy of the Myanmar Government in the eyes of other governments in the region.

The visit of General Maung Aye is, therefore, timely and contributive to strengthening our bilateral relations. The visit will increase Indo-Myanmar cooperation to prevent insurgency along the sensitive 1,600-kilometre Indo-Myanmar border. Myanmar has problems with Kachins, and we have problems with Naga separatists.

Activating economic and technological cooperation was an important objective of this visit. If India speeds up the building up of the Imphal-Tamukalemayo Road, a true beginning will be made to consolidate Myanmar as a land bridge between India and Southeast Asian countries.



KFLO 2/11/92

Delhi, Hanoi believe 'silence is golden'

Hanoi

8 NOVEMBER

AS INDIA and Vietnam seek to rediscover each other and give a strong economic content to their political ties, strategic analysts say their script is deliberately silent on the key 'C' word that is of immense strategic and security interest to both countries.

The 'C' word is for China, whose growing military, economic and political clout is causing concern not only to India and Vietnam but also to other countries of the Southeast Asian region and Japan.

But while both visiting external affairs minister Jaswant Singh and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Dy Nien were careful not to mention the subject, analysts say India, Vietnam and Japan were slowly working towards a strategic triangle that would help contain any future threat from the "Chinese dragon".

However, senior Indian officials deny that New Delhi's "sudden rediscovery" of Vietnam and the countries of the Southeast



FROM INDIA WITH LOVE: Foreign minister Jaswant Singh and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Dy Nien sign documents during a ceremony in Hanoi on Wednesday.— AFP

Asian region have anything to do with China. "We don't want to pose as a rival to China. It is not a competition with China for influence, it is only to ensure that we are not left out of the economic opportunities available here," one official said.

Jaswant Singh's three-day visit, which concluded Wednesday, has helped the two countries focus on transforming their close political ties into strong economic cooperation and this process will get a further push during Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's planned visit here early next year.

Defense minister George Fernandes, who visited Vietnam in March, and reports about a defense agreement between the two countries, including training of Indian soldiers in jungle warfare in Vietnam, had created ripples in official circles here, informed sources said.

"The priority of Vietnam at this juncture is not building its military capability. It is building its economic strength," noted retired Maj Gen Ashok Mehta, a security analyst travelling with Singh on this trip. PTI

The Economic Times

9 NOV 2000

Vietnam figures on India's energy security map

Shishir Gupta

Hanoi, November 9

Jaswant In Hanoi

VIETNAM HAS firmly come on India's energy security map with New Delhi deciding to invest another 250 million US dollars in the production of commercial gas at Nam Con son basin on the continental shelf.

Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Dzy Nein disclosed this at the Joint Commission meeting this morning.

According to the Minister, ONGC-Videsh of India, Petro Vietnam and other partners in the joint venture had reached an agreement on a revised contract and were now actively preparing for the commercial production of gas in block 06-1 at Nam Con Son on Vietnam's continental shelf.

It is learnt that India has set up a Committee on Investment Promotion in the Nam Con Son gas project and to examine the signing of the commitment and guarantee with the Vietnam government. In this context, India has plans to invest another US 230-250 million dollars in this project.

Vietnam is the fourth largest producer of oil and gas in South-East Asia. In fact crude oil is Vietnam's biggest revenue earner with production in excess of 15 million tones of crude oil and one billion cubic meters of gas. While the Mekong basin has the largest oil-producing field, the Nam Con Son and the Malay-Tho Chu basins have the highest known gas reserves in the

India has set up a Committee on Investment Promotion in the Nam Con Son gas project and to examine the signing of the commitment and guarantee with the Vietnam Government

country. With petrol and gas consumption expected to cross 120 million metric tones and 96 million metric tones, India is all set to become the fourth largest consumer of energy this decade. Thus, the need for New Delhi to draw plans to look at procurement of oil and gas from South-East Asia rather than be totally dependent on the Persian Gulf.

As Vietnam is lacking in crude oil processing facilities, India has an opportunity to ask Hanoi to export crude oil to its energy hungry markets. This will also give a major boost to the bilateral trade that stands at a modest 150 million US dollars. The

scope is likely to expand further once the Spratly Island (Hoang Sa basin) dispute between Vietnam and China is resolved.

For quite sometime, India's energy security plans in the east have been revolving around Vietnam, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Besides Vietnam, energy planners visualise a pipeline system from Myanmar via Bangladesh that would head for the Indian markets.

However, energy plans with regards to Myanmar and Bangladesh have not materialised due to political considerations in certain quarters. Given the nature of problem, India on its part is trying to work out an arrangement for oil and gas supplies under the multilateral framework of BIMSTEC - comprising of Bay of Bengal littoral nations.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 NOV 2000

HD-13

A new get-together, says Jaswant

By Amit Baruah

VIENTIANE (LAOS), NOV. 10. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, today described the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) grouping as a "new family, in a new get-together" fashioned by the historical affinity between the people of India, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam.

In his statement at the inaugural meeting, Mr. Singh said: "For India, our relationship with South-East Asia is a significant and valued aspect of our international relations. In the last five years, India has become, a dialogue partner of ASEAN, has a robust cooperative work programme in bio-

technology, space technology, information technology.... and human resource development."

"There is significantly increased travel now between India and ASEAN, as witnessed by a greater demand for traffic rights of ASEAN airlines operating in India. Both trade and investment between India and South-East Asia is on the upward swing, despite having suffered a small reversal during the recent financial crisis.... today.... we join hands with you in this new Mekong-Ganga endeavour. I believe that this intensity of cooperation between India and South-East Asia will lead to the economic development of both our regions," Mr. Singh told the conference.

9-56 Area

The Minister said the six countries were seeking closer interaction at the people-to-people level through the MGC initiative. Referring to the shared heritage of the region, Mr. Singh said the region's architecture, music, dance and theatre had been enriched by this exchange.

"Our part of the world today produces amongst the finest handicrafts in textiles, wood, gold, silver and other metals. We also have outstanding tourist sites, many undeveloped and perhaps some still unknown. That they should attract the world traveller is our common aim," he said.

According to Mr. Singh, the MGC six had an unbroken cul-

tural continuity that was extremely rare in today's world of hybridisation and formed the "bedrock for the fundamental stability of our societies".

"Basing itself on this affinity, the Vientiane Declaration... brings together elements that should attract historians, scholars, craftpersons, media and business people from among our countries. The Declaration would be an expression of what our people can do together, visibly and continuously. It will be and it is a revival, in the present day context, of an interactive vitality that has proven itself in the past, and can culturally and commercially energise us afresh," the Minister's speech added.

THE HINDU

11 NOV 2000

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation in place

By Amit Baruah

VIENTIANE (LAOS), NOV. 10. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) got off the ground today with six Ministers from India, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand launching the grouping by issuing the "Vientiane Declaration" on the framework for cooperation.

Though in a fledgling state, the Mekong-Ganga "six" reflects a departure in Indian foreign policy as New Delhi seeks to give effect to what the former Prime Minister, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, called the "look East" policy. The Vientiane Declaration said it had been "inspired by a common desire to develop closer relations and better understanding among the six countries to enhance friendship, solidarity and cooperation."

In the tourism field, the MGC decided to conduct strategic studies for joint marketing, launch the Mekong-Ganga Tou-

rism Investment Guide, facilitate the travel of people in the region, expand multi-modal communication and transportation links to enhance travel and tourism and promote cultural-religious package tours.

The Declaration committed the member countries the develop transport networks — in particular the "East-West Corridor" and the "Trans-Asian Highway" — under the rubric of transport and communication.

The promotion of air services and linkages in the MGC region and the strengthening of cooperation in the development of IT infrastructure and networks also form part of the joint statement issued by the six Ministers.

The grouping agreed to promote joint research in the fields of dance, music and theatrical forms and organise round-tables for journalists, writers and experts in literature, performing arts, women's empowerment, health and nutrition and the con-

servation, preservation and protection of heritage sites and artefacts. The MGC consented to encourage the establishment of networking and twinning arrangements among universities in the region, translate classics of MGC countries into other MGC languages and assured the participation in book fairs in member countries on a commercial basis.

A concept paper, approved by the six Ministers at what was formally termed the inaugural ministerial meeting on the MGC, said the cooperation arrangement, primarily aimed at increasing tourism, will also serve as "building blocks" for other areas of mutual benefit. The MGC's objective was to announce to the international community its "political willingness and aspirations aimed at strengthening our traditional bonds of friendship."

It would also facilitate inter-State movement and transit transport of goods and people in

the region. The concept paper made it clear that ministerial meetings would be led by Foreign Ministers and would take place back-to-back with the ASEAN Ministerial meeting (AMM) — Post Ministerial conference (PMC) held annually in July of each year.

"The next ministerial meeting will take place in July 2001 at Hanoi. The Chairmanship will be rotated in the alphabetical order," the paper stated. Laos, which hosted the inaugural meeting, will remain MGC Chair till July 2001 when Myanmar will take over and continue till July 2002. The country, which is serving as Chair, shall act as the secretariat to carry out coordination and implementation of the cooperation plan.

Clearly, the MGC reflects a new beginning in India's cooperation efforts with Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

A 'new get-together': Page 13

THE HINDU

11 NOV 2000

India, Singapore task force on economic cooperation

4/11
HD-13
By V. Jayanth

SINGAPORE, NOV. 10. India and Singapore today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to set up a task force on economic cooperation. This follows the task force on Information Technology set up after the visit of Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, to India in January.

The MoU was signed this morning at Istana, President's House here, after the visiting head of state, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, was given a ceremonial welcome. His Singapore counterpart, Mr. S. R. Nathan, was also present.

The Tourism Minister, Mr. Ananth Kumar, and Singapore's Minister for Trade and Industry, Mr. George Yeo, signed the MoU. To be headed by Mr. G. S. Dutt from the Finance Ministry, and Mr. Ong Ye Kung from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the task force will examine how the two countries can "broaden and deepen economic linkages and promote greater trade and investment flows".

In particular, it will study ways and means by which Singapore can become a "catalyst" for India's reforms (a pet theme of Mr. Goh); examine the possibility of establishing a Free Trade Area and recommend proposals for ex-

panding trade, economic and financial sector cooperation over the next 10 years.

Briefing reporters later, the Secretary, Economic Relations, Ministry of External Affairs, Mr. S.T. Devare, said the first meeting would be held in New Delhi, perhaps within the next few weeks, with the participation of the Finance Ministers. Since the IT task force met first in Singapore, India offered to hold this meeting in Delhi.

The 45-minute meeting between the two heads of state was stated to be "wide-ranging, cordial and warm". Bilateral and regional issues figured in the discussions, in which the two Ministers, Mr. Ananth Kumar and Mr. George Yeo, besides the visiting Indian MPs and officials from both sides participated.

"Synergy in ties" and IT were the key areas of focus and both the countries expressed a keen desire to "work closely together".

The general feeling was that the bilateral relationship had entered a new and dynamic phase with Mr. Goh's visit to India. Mr. Narayanan, with his visit, had imparted a new dimension to the ties and reinforced the view that New Delhi was indeed "looking east".

Apart from the India-ASEAN interaction, in which Singapore plays a prominent role, Chi-

na also figured in the talks. The Singapore side enquired about the President's visit to China.

Mr. Yeo said he would visit India at the month-end with a major delegation. Apart from visiting major centres, he would participate in the "ground breaking ceremony" for the second phase of Singapore's IT Park in Bangalore. The first phase had been completed and was formally inaugurated by Mr. Goh in January. Mr. Yeo will also launch the marketing for its second stage.

Two other agreements were also signed today. One related to a Cultural exchange programme, called the third India-Singapore Executive programme (2000-2002), to enhance cooperation in heritage preservation, museum exhibitions and exchange of archival material. The other was for 'loaning' artifacts, under which, India would send material for exhibition in Singapore's Asian Civilisation Museum.

Mr. Narayanan, who arrived late last night, accompanied by Mrs. Usha Narayanan, inspected a guard of honour at Istana. The national anthem of both countries were played. Many of the diplomatic heads in Singapore were present and introduced to Mr. Narayanan.

THE HINDU

11 NOV 2000

Cooperation project to bridge Mekong-Ganga gap

KEITH FLORY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

VIENTIANE, Nov. 10. — Geography has dictated that thousands of miles separate the lands nourished by the Mekong and the Ganga, two of Asia's most important river systems. Culture and philosophy, essentially that which centres around Buddhism, has created links of an emotional and spiritual kind. Today a bridge of cooperation was sought to be built across those miles: the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation project was launched.

The ministers dealing with foreign affairs or tourism from Laos, Cambodia, Thailand,

Myanmar and Vietnam (the Mekong basin nations) were joined by India's minister for external affairs, Mr Jaswant Singh, to bring into reality a concept mooted last year. It was a modest beginning, but if the sentiments expressed by those dignitaries was an indication of commitment, the foundation they laid appeared firm.

Each one of them stressed the need for cooperation, and identified tourism, culture, and the development of human resources as the first steps on a road that will lead to greater networking of communications, transport, and infrastructure development. This will facilitate the economic

activity that provides sinews to each of those countries, and muscle to them collectively. A formal declaration was issued when their deliberations ended.

While cultural tourism within the six nations will get the initial priority, utilising the comparative advantage of the region has also been emphasised, as also the plan to let the international community know of the "political willingness and aspirations" of these nations.

Apart from working among themselves, the MGC would welcome finding support from regional and international agencies. Stress has also been laid on private business activi-

ty within the grouping. A mechanism has been established for servicing the MGC. Laos will be its first Chairman and provide the secretariat backing, the leadership will rotate annually.

Addressing the opening session, Mr Jaswant Singh described the six-nation gathering as "a new family, in a new get-together because of the historical affinity between our people and lands, and the promise that they see in our strengthened cooperation." The MGC should eventually unleash the "entrepreneurial dynamism among our people and a desire for a defining place in the new global economy."

That dynamism would have to be tapped in the implementation of MGC programmes said the minister, they most not be limited to action at governmental levels.

The Declaration called for the development of strategies for joint marketing of the GMC region as a tourist destination, means to facilitate travel within the region, and package tours on a regional basis.

On the cultural front it called for common efforts for the promotion of the export of handicrafts and textiles, a programme for the conservation of heritage manuscripts, sites and for their inclusion in the UN list, and developing a net-



Mr. Jaswant Singh

work for the exchange of tourist information.

Dealing with education, it called for student exchanges, book fairs, and translation of each others' classics. Financial assistance would be sought for research on economic, historic and cultural themes of relevance to two or more MGC countries.

Turning to transport and communication, the declaration called for developing regional networks, particularly an East-West corridor project and the trans-Asian highway. Adding to air services in the region was also stressed. Emphasis was placed on the development of IT infrastruc-

THE STATESMAN

11 NOV 2003

H10-14

'Indo-Myanmar road link by January'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 10. India and Myanmar are expected to inaugurate a key cross-border road link early next year as part of a trans-Asian highway network.

The 165 km-long India-built road from Tamu to Kalemmyo in Myanmar is expected to be inaugurated in late December or early January, a senior foreign office official said. This road will connect India's national highway which terminates at Moreh in Manipur. With this corridor in place, motor vehicles from India can reach out to other parts of Myanmar.

Myanmar, in turn, is being linked to the rest of South East Asia under an on-going U.N.-sponsored trans-Asian highway project from Iran to China. Myanmar is seen here as a land bridge

which will integrate India with South East Asia. Given its strategic geographical location, Yangon has emerged as the centerpiece for promoting New Delhi's "look east" policy.

Besides Tamu-Kalemmyo, India is envisaging more cross-border road links to Myanmar from its north eastern States, including Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. These ideas are expected to be discussed during the visit to India by the Vice Chairman of Myanmar's Peace and Development council, General Maung Aye.

General Maung, who begins a visit to India on November 14 will be the highest ranking leader from Myanmar in a decade. He will be accompanied by the Ministers of foreign affairs, finance, commerce, industry and science

and technology.

According to officials, the Tamu Kalemmyo road is expected to eventually spur trade between India and Myanmar over land. This will supplement the existing arrangement of cargo transportation by sea via Singapore.

The establishment of a cross-border network is also expected to yield benefits in the security arena. With more roads available, both countries will be better positioned to counter insurgencies which they face, either unilaterally or through joint operations. Not surprisingly, New Delhi and Yangon have a well established joint working group on border management.

Trade between the two countries is currently modest, but could go up substantially if Myanmar begins to sell natural gas to

India. Foreign companies engaged in prospecting oil and gas in the region are currently debating the possibility of constructing a network of pipelines from Myanmar and Bangladesh for distribution of natural gas to the Indian market.

Indian officials are also discussing these possibilities either through direct negotiations or under the framework of BIMSTEC — an economic grouping of countries including Myanmar and Bangladesh straddling the Bay of Bengal.

Aware of the high strategic stakes in Myanmar, India appears fully set to unhesitatingly engage the military government in Myanmar. General Maung, during his stay, will hold meetings right across India's political and bureaucratic elite.

THE HINDU

11 NOV 2000

Sceptics term 'Look East' policy cosmetic

Pranil Pal Chaudhuri
Singapore, November 11

AMID A general enthusiasm for India, Singaporeans still ask whether India's "Look East" policy will go beyond just looks. The present weekend visit of the Indian President, K. R. Narayanan, is sending signals that India is here to stay in Southeast Asia.

But business-minded Singaporeans are perhaps more reassured of India's commitment by the software pact signed between NASSCOM and the Singapore Information Technology Federation on Friday than the three agreements Mr Narayanan signed with his Singaporean counterpart, S.R. Nathan.

Talking with Singaporean intellectuals, Mr Narayanan admitted India's fickle interest in Southeast

Asia. India was "re-engaging" the region, he said. "The Look East policy is an old policy being revived."

Some of the academics expressed scepticism. One of them, Mr Daljit Singh, noted India had been "contained" by "Pakistan and China" to South Asia. Another Singaporean later explained the real result was New Delhi's subcontinent "mind-set."

The two governments saw the economic memorandum of understanding signed by the two presidents in different lights. For Singapore's government-owned *Straits Times*, the MoU was noteworthy only because it said the Task Force on Economic Cooperation would "examine" the setting-up of a bilateral free trade agreement. Indian officials were deprecatory about the FTA. It was

too early, they said. The issue needed "study".

The FTA symbolises what Singapore sees as New Delhi's blinkers regarding the wider world. Officials here see an FTA's economic benefits as being of secondary interest.

Singapore has few barriers to Indian imports. Its economists doubt India will ever absorb more than a fraction of Singapore's exports.

For Singapore, the FTA's real purpose is winking India out of its subcontinental shell. It is an uphill task.

With Mr Narayanan's trip, New Delhi has at last agreed to look at a FTA. But a Singaporean FTA proposal has been kicking around the corridors of the Indian government for over a year.

Singapore is hopeful India's eco-

nomie growth, notably its information technology success, could expand New Delhi's horizon. At the official banquet for Mr Narayanan, Mr Nathan spoke of the Bangalore IT Park as Singapore's "flagship project". Among the normal platitudes, he noted India had "an 18.5 per cent share of the global customised software market". India and Singapore's first task force, set up in October, was in IT.

However, India's private sector is going where New Delhi fears to tread. Speaking about the IT agreement he had signed, Dewang Mehta of NASSCOM, said on Saturday that bilateral software trade was likely to rise from \$ 60 million last year to \$ 500 million by 2004-5. Of special interest was the number of joint Indo-Singapore IT exports to third countries.

'Mekong project aimed at economic development'

By Amit Baruah

VIENTIANE (LAOS), NOV. 9. The Laotian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Mr. Somsavat Lengsavad, today made it clear that the Ganga-Mekong cooperation project, which will be inaugurated tomorrow, was not intended to establish a military grouping against anybody.

Addressing a joint press conference with the visiting External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, Mr. Lengsavad said the "Ganga-Mekong" process was primarily intended to assist the countries in the region to promote economic development.

The Lao Minister was responding to a question whether the "Ganga-Mekong six" of India, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos were forming a group to serve as a counter-poise to China in the area. His answer came days before the visit of the Chinese President, Mr. Jiang Zemin, to Laos.

The Foreign Ministers from India, Laos and Vietnam and the Tourism Ministers from Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia are expected to issue the "Vientiane Decla-

ration" when they inaugurate the project. (A day before the formal inauguration of the project, which will initially focus on the areas of tourism, culture and education, a crude bomb exploded at the Vientiane airport, in which four persons were reportedly injured. No group has claimed responsibility for the blast which comes when Ministers from all five Mekong countries and India were present in Vientiane.)

Trade, economic pacts

At the third India-Laos Joint Commission meeting, which was inaugurated by Mr. Singh and Mr. Lengsavad, two agreements on trade and economic cooperation as well as promotion and protection of bilateral investment were signed.

The External Affairs Minister told persons that Laos had reiterated its support for India's entry into the United Nations Security Council during the bilateral talks.

Mr. Singh said medicines worth Rs. 3.5 millions would be supplied to Laos as relief following the recent floods in the country. Briefing visiting presspersons, the Indian Ambassador to Laos, Ms. Lavanya Prasad,

stated the two countries had been concentrating on agriculture and human resources development. Laos was interested in greater cooperation in the teaching of English, information technology and remote sensing.

Though the volume of trade between the two was less than half-a-million dollars annually, Laos had purchased a large number of water pumps from an Indian company to boost rice production in the country which now stood at 2.1 million tonnes, she said. This was enough to meet the requirements of 4.8 million Laos.

In 1998-99 alone, the Kirloskar company sold water pumps worth \$ 18.6 million to Laos — till date the Indian firm has bagged \$ 39 million in water pump orders from this landlocked South-East Asian country.

It was also announced today that India would gift 25 jeeps and 10 trucks to the Lao armed forces and the 25 positions for Laos in the India Technical and Education (ITEC) programme would now be increased to 35.

In order to boost economic cooperation between the two countries, it was decided

that Laos would survey and identify areas in which Indian business would be interested.

Today's meeting of the India-Vietnamese Joint Commission was the third since the mechanism was set up in 1996.

Mr. Jaswant Singh is only the second Indian External Affairs Minister to visit Vietnam — the first was Mr. Pranab Mukherjee in 1996.

Crude oil purchase

UNI reports from Hanoi:

In a bid to step up flagging bilateral economic cooperation, India has agreed to explore the purchase of crude oil and phosphate from Vietnam while the latter has expressed willingness to examine opening up its banking channels.

These were among the major decisions taken at the 10th bilateral Joint Commission meeting on technical, scientific and economic cooperation which concluded here on Wednesday, official sources said. The meeting was headed by Mr. Jaswant Singh and his counterpart, Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien.

THE HINDU

12 NOV 2000

Delhi leans towards Myanmar junta



Suu Kyi

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Nov. 11: After years of rolling back and forth, India appears to have given up on pro-democracy leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi and decided to work with the junta in Myanmar for improving bilateral relations.

The government has invited the vice-chairman of the ruling State Development and Peace Committee (SDPC), Gen. Maung Aye, to India for a week-long official visit from November 14.

Maung, number two in the pecking order of the military regime in Yangon, is also the chief

of the Myanmar army and heads the country's trade council as well.

Maung will be the highest ranking Myanmar official to visit India since 1990 when the army moved in and seized control after Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in the elections.

Explaining Delhi's stand, a senior foreign office official said: "We are committed to democratic principles. But it is our considered view that a sustainable solution to the problem in Myanmar should come from within."

Maung will kick off his visit from Bodh Gaya. He will be ac-

panied by a high-level delegation which includes the deputy prime minister and ministers of defence, finance, foreign affairs, commerce, science and technology and industry. His wife and daughter will be with him.

Apart from Delhi and Bodh Gaya, Maung will visit Agra, Udaipur and Bangalore.

The SDPC vice-chairman is expected to meet President K.R. Narayanan, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Vice-President Krishan Kant. But though Maung heads his country's army, he will not meet defence minister George Fernandes.

Fernandes is said to be a sym-

pathiser of the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar. Officials here, however, argued that the Myanmar general's programme is still being worked out.

For Delhi, developing strong ties with the junta became necessary because of the changing ground situation over the past decade. The two sides share a land boundary of over 1,600 km and also a substantial maritime border.

The two nations have shared strong cultural ties and Myanmar leaders were deeply influenced by the Indian independence movement, before gaining their own in 1948.

Optimism as Narayanan ends talks with Singapore leaders

By V. Jayanth

110-11
SINGAPORE, NOV. 11. The President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, today concluded his discussions with Singapore leaders and there was clearly an agreement on how to further strengthen and deepen the relationship.

Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, called on the President at noon and then hosted a lunch in his honour. He had a 40-minute meeting with Mr. Narayanan and the Indian delegation, which included the Tourism Minister, Mr. Ananth Kumar, four MPs and a team of senior officials.

In the evening, the Senior Minister and former Premier, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, called on the President at his hotel suite and discussed bilateral, regional and global issues for about 45 minutes.

Both the Singapore leaders are known to be candid in their views and Mr. Goh has remained optimistic about India's economic potential and the scope for expanding bilateral economic cooperation.

Mr. Narayanan, invited the two leaders to visit India again and keep in touch with the developments there. He took some time to outline the problems in evolving the economic policy and reassured Singapore that the process of liberalisation was irreversible and there was a broad degree of political consensus on it now.

Both the leaders underscored

the need for India to quicken the pace of reforms so that it could not only achieve its potential, but also provide more opportunities for foreign investments and increased trade flows. Mr. Goh pre-

with many other countries in the Asia Pacific region.

'Larger role for India'

Briefing the media on the talks, the Secretary, Economic Relations, Ministry of External Affairs, Mr. S.T. Devare, said the Singapore Prime Minister invited India to go beyond economic relations to play a larger role in the region as a strategic partner in the geopolitical landscape. Its involvement with the region should increase and expand in all directions.

India's High Commissioner for Singapore, Mr. P.P. Shukla, said the Mr. Lee, who had a first hand knowledge of the growing bilateral economic ties, expressed the hope that India would push ahead with further reforms.

Mr. Lee discussed the developments in the region flowing from both the economic crisis and the political undercurrents.

In the morning, Mr. Narayanan visited the Toa Payoh township to look at Singapore's Housing Development Board schemes and concept. He and Mrs. Usha Narayanan, also visited an apartment and saw for themselves the planning and execution.

The President was told that the Board provided 85 per cent of the housing units in the City State and that 90 per cent of its apartments were under ownership scheme.

Usha Narayanan meets old friend

SINGAPORE, NOV. 11. The First Lady, Mrs. Usha Narayanan, met her old family friend, Mrs. Claire Chiang, at the headquarters of the Singapore Council of Women's Organisation (SCWO) on Friday.

The SCWO president, Ms. Shirley Lim, introduced Mrs. Chiang as someone familiar to the visitor. "Mrs. Chiang and the First Lady are friends and I thought it would be a good idea to bring them together," she said. An aide to the Indian visitor said Mr. and Mrs. Narayanan were close family friends of Mrs. Chiang's father-in-law and a former diplomat, Ho Rih Hwa. Mrs. Chiang and her husband Ho Kwon Ping had also been regular visitors to the Narayanan family, she added. — UNI

sented his case for examining the feasibility of a Free Trade Agreement between the two countries and explained how Singapore was working out similar arrangements

THE HINDU

12 NOV 2000

TIES WITH MYANMAR

Time To Reclaim The Lost Process

By JK DUTT

THE *Statesman's* recent net poll on the proposition "Doesn't the overture to Myanmar by hosting the Yangon junta's No 2 functionary on an official visit erode India's moral posture against the overthrow of democratically elected government?" elicited a 50 per cent "yes" response. This showed that the Nehruvian "Holier than thou" attitude still dominates our minds, never mind the fact that India is rated as one of the world's most morally and materially corrupt countries!

A discerning observer of foreign affairs, Sahdev Vohra, ICS, had commented years ago that India's relations with Myanmar had to take into account the strategic imponderables of an unfavourable stretch of terrain separating the two neighbours. Factually, two imperatives seek attention in this regard. These are, first, the Trijunction locality linking India, China and Myanmar near the Diphuk Pass between Rima (China) and Putao (Myanmar) which skirts Arunachal Pradesh, which needs to be effectively monitored by us and second, the long, common porous border between Myanmar and the Indian states of Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, measuring some 1450 kms, that has to be properly secured.

INDIA'S LOSSES

However, India's foreign policy which has been predicated more on moral principles than pragmatic ones relegated this vital aspect of Indo-Myanmarese relations to a less than important status. When the Myanmarese military junta took over that country in 1988, India reacted with its usual pronouncements on subversion of democracy by the military. Relations nosedived with the Suu Kyi episode. Simultaneously, Myanmar faced two major charges from various world bodies - human rights abuses, and trading in narcotics. Even the World Bank's carrot-for-democracy soft loan of one billion dollars to revamp its failing economy was of no avail to the junta.

China stepped in at this juncture to hold Myanmar's hand, doubtless for its own interests but it suited the junta well enough. China's Yunnan province shares a fairly long common boundary with Myanmar and both countries being protagonists of "one party rule", struck up a cordiality which increased by the day. It was only when China started influencing Myanmar's affairs with Yangon willingly playing ball that India realised the gravity of the situation.

This apart, another disconcerting matter crept up. As far back as the 80s, Myanmar laid claim to Tuivang and Molcham villages of Manipur both of which lay on the international border. Tuivang soon became Myanmarese property - the relevant demarcating border pillars simply disappeared! Molcham too got appropriated on the specious plea that it stood on the Tamu (India)-

Kalewa (Myanmar) road which was built during the second world war and which meandered along an approximate alignment with the border, crisscrossing tributaries of the Chindwin river and finally swinging south deep into Myanmar. Unfortunately, New Delhi had no ready answer to Yangon's motivated rationale despite several representations from Imphal. Emboldened, Yangon now started providing succour to various insurgent groups operating in North East India; presumably,



Beijing had a hand in this.

Meanwhile, China set up a surveillance station on Myanmar's Coco Islands south of Yangon and is acquiring similar facilities at Ramree Island off the Arakan coast and in the Mergui Archipelago complex near Tenasserim in south Myanmar. This clearly shows the hold that Beijing exerts over Yangon. It dawned on New Delhi that an attitudinal shift was necessary in our foreign policy in order to deal with these developments. Shedding its earlier moralisation, India began interacting with Myanmar in real earnest. We dispatched high-level delegations to Yangon, commencing with the then Foreign Secretary JN Dixit in 1993. Subsequently, official visits were made by Army Chief General BC Joshi to Myanmar followed by Navy Chief Admiral VS Shekhawat to China. Faculty members from our Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, and United Service Institution of India toured Myanmar and China, respectively, on fact-finding missions. Inputs from all of these convinced New Delhi that a calculated thaw in favour of Yangon was the need of the hour. This sensible change in attitude is commendable and pragmatic. Regular exchanges of delegations between India and Myanmar with open agendas took place.

PRAGMATISM

Erstwhile Foreign Secretary K Raghunath led a high-power team in February 1999 when he made it clear to Yangon's state peace and development council that India was not interested in Myanmar's internal affairs, be they Suu Kyi or whatever: India's only interest was to develop trade and political relationships. Myanmar's admission into Asean whose regional forum hosts India as a full dialogue partner also helped in realising our objective. A formal border trade post had been set up at Tamu-Moreh by then. Our Home Secretary Kamenal Pande visited Yangon during August this year to further consolidate the

Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1994 between New Delhi and Yangon. Myanmar responded very favourably as is evident from the top flight delegation headed by Myanmar's vice chairman and Army Chief General Maung Aye which toured India for a whole week during November this year.

The benefits that accrued from this visit were manifold. A second border trade post is scheduled to come up at Chhaphai in Mizoram; India's credit to Myanmar of \$15 million makes us one of Myanmar's largest export markets;

Myanmar's intelligence feedbacks to our security forces enable them to prevent infiltration as well as exfiltration by insurgents along the common border; a new transportation channel comprising road, river and sea modes will come up connecting Calcutta with Yangon through North-East India. This could very well become an adjunct to the Kunming Initiative taken by China during President KR Narayanan's visit there earlier in the year. Thus the proposed growth triangle consisting of North East India, Myanmar and Yunnan gains in viability. Myanmar's GDP is expected to touch a record 92 million Kyat and India's contribution to this revenue is substantial.

ROHINGYAS

India has to be wary of one major problem, viz., the movement of a rebellious ethnic tribe, the Rohingya Muslims, from Myanmar to Bangladesh, on the one hand, and their being repatriated as these people are unwelcome there. North East India is a convenient staging area for such clandestine trespassing and it is likely that some Rohingyas have settled down on our soil. This problem in course of time could also create bad blood between New Delhi and Dhaka, over and above the existing Chakma issue. Such developments bring in their wake the scourge of arms and drug trafficking, not to mention exacerbating the prevailing insurgency in this region.

In conclusion, New Delhi should gradually build on its "Look East" policy and profitably utilise its budding rapprochement with Myanmar as a springboard. Swarna Bhumi, as we used to call old Burma, and Hindustan were ever united in political thought till Partition disturbed the equilibrium. It is time to reclaim the lost process. Additionally, this will help India to get closer to China if we can successfully use the tried and tested "Third Party" model of international relations. Maybe sooner or later, an India-Myanmar-China G3 Group could come into being. We need to comprehend the unlimited potential that India's eastern flank possesses and accordingly make amends for five decades of indifference. The time to pull out all the stops is now.

Tailpiece: if we could readjust our mindset into accepting Myanmar's military government, why cannot we do likewise in respect of Pakistan?

The author is Lt. Col. (retd.), Indian Army.

A CHINK IN INDIA'S DIPLOMACY?

INDIA'S GEOPOLITICAL REACH does not seem to have sufficiently impressed the leaders of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Their latest decision not to invite India to the annual summit-level talks involving the ASEAN and its East Asian dialogue partners is not good news for an aspiring global player. However, it is a setback that New Delhi must be able to take in its stride. The ASEAN has reckoned that India is not an automatic choice for the membership of an informal economic club that consists of 10 Southeast Asian states as also China and Japan besides South Korea. The ASEAN+3 has already acquired some definitive shape in the past few years as an exclusive pan-East Asian caucus. In openly endorsing India's exclusion from it, China has now seized upon the point about the geographical limits of the ASEAN+3 as an East Asian grouping. However, India had, in evincing interest in the ASEAN+3, taken note of its political diversity. New Delhi hoped to give a thrust to its own 'Look-East' policy by interacting directly with an outfit that consists of not only Japan, an economic powerhouse, but also China, a key player on the fast track of international politics and strategic affairs. The other consideration was that India should not divorce itself from the growing economic vibrance of East Asia. As a microcosm of the world economy, the ASEAN+3 can indeed seek to harmonise the views of a rich country like Japan with those of the developing nations on global trade issues. From India's standpoint, therefore, a diplomatic 'uplinking' with East Asia may partially offset the disadvantages of a continued exclusion from the forum for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

The ASEAN's reasoning about the "difficulty" of widening the scope of a quintessential East Asian summitry does not ring hollow. History and the cross-currents of Asia-Pacific poli-

tics account for the ASEAN's special relationship with the China-Japan-South Korea triangle. In the ASEAN's own perspective, a pan-East Asian dialogue translates into a systematic engagement with an economic superpower besides a political-military force as well. India is not obviously seen by the ASEAN as either a regional economic power or a major political force of direct consequence to Southeast Asia at this juncture. It is in this context that New Delhi needs to demonstrate the truth in its stated view of itself as a stabilising force in Southeast Asia.

Now, the proposal for an 'East Asia Security Forum', which the Philippines floated at the time of last year's informal meeting of the ASEAN+3, is still an idea with little or no endorsement by key Southeast Asian countries. Its strategic scope remains undefined in a region that plays host to the U.S.' military personnel. However, given the potential of the ASEAN+3 to evolve into a multi-dimensional outfit, India may have lost a desirable opportunity in regional diplomacy. Yet, New Delhi's existing connections with the ASEAN are not to be under-estimated. Regrettable, therefore, is that the ASEAN thinks it is too early now to consider holding separate annual summits with India. In this context, New Delhi may do well to inject a dose of dynamism to its ties with the ASEAN as also its sub-regions. A new beginning has been made in recent weeks. What India must do now is to add substance to the agreement in principle on the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiative. New Delhi will certainly profit by dispelling an impression of wanting to compete with China for the affections of the ASEAN sub-region linked to the Mekong. Overall, India must signal that it regards the ASEAN as a prime and not collateral area of interest.

THE HINDU

30 NOV 2000

The Mekong-Ganga initiative

By V. Jayanth

10-12 28/11

IN A reaffirmation of its Look-East policy, India floated a new cooperative forum with five of its eastern neighbours, the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) forum, from the Laotian capital of Vientiane on November 10. Though similar in approach to the sub-regional grouping called the Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the areas of focus may be somewhat different in the case of the MGC. Since Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam are the other members of the MG-Six, there are not only areas of overlap, but a much greater responsibility on New Delhi to make a success of this venture.

Obviously, a lot of thinking and planning has gone into the MGC, which was approved in principle by the six countries on the sidelines of the last ASEAN meeting in Bangkok in July. It was significant that the launch was fixed for the little, land-locked country of Laos, which needs all the help it can get from neighbours and friends. For whatever reason, tourism, culture and education have been given precedence and priority in the cooperative framework. Transport, communications and infrastructure will receive attention in the next phase, though the planning will have to begin forthwith. The Foreign Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, and his officials in South Block, must have taken into consideration the needs of the Mekong basin states while listing the priorities. So New Delhi must be quite prepared to extend its hand not only of friendship, but also cooperation in concrete terms. It provides another vehicle to engage Myanmar.

The selection of the MG-Six did raise a few eyebrows in the region. Myanmar was obviously chosen because it remains India's land neighbour and bridge to the rest of Southeast Asia. And Thailand becomes its neighbour. Thailand has always fancied itself as being the 'Gateway to Indochina' — Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. So there is a bridge of continuity in the member-states of the new vehicle. But by calling itself the Mekong-Ganga Forum, there were obvious questions on why China and Bangladesh were not considered. The answers too were equally obvious. Bangla-

desh is already a part of BIMSTEC, while China was fully engaged in the Mekong Basin projects through a parallel sub-regional platform. So they were conveniently left out to make the new body more homogeneous and close-knit.

India's kinship with Indochina is too well known to need any elaboration. But apart from the political investment made in the 1970s or earlier, New Delhi did precious little to build on that special equation and respect that India enjoyed in that

region. So tourism has to be seen from that perspective.

Buddhism is the natural link to Southeast Asia, particularly this Mekong basin. Visiting the major Buddhist pilgrim centres in India may be a dream for many people there, but the question is can they afford a trip by air? Unless there is a rail or road link to India, a majority of these people can only dream of it. So developing road and rail links will have to move to the top priority list if tourism has to be encour-

The Mekong-Ganga cooperation forum provides another opportunity for India and its private sector to build on the past and create a niche in Indochina.

part of Southeast Asia. One by one, the three Indochina countries have joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and begun the process of economic development and cooperation. After neglecting that region for a decade and more, India has now chosen to re-focus on Indochina — the immediate neighbourhood of China and part of the mainland Southeast Asia.

Having failed to cash in on the historical and political ties with the Mekong delta, the MGC provides another opportunity for India and its private sector to build on the past and create a niche in the region. The choice of tourism, culture and education may be significant from one perspective and quite odd from another. It may be difficult for most of the Vietnamese, Cambodians or the Laotians to embark on a visit to India anytime soon. Cambodia and Laos may be finding it difficult to finance even the frequent visit of their officials and delegations to the 300-odd ASEAN meetings held annually in different centres. But they offer some very beautiful, scenic and idyllic tourist attractions — religious, cultural, historical or even just some tourist resorts. They have their own airlines and a few regional airlines connecting their major destinations with countries such as Thailand, Malaysia or Singapore for example. India has direct flights only to Myanmar and Thailand and there has been no justification for regular services to the Indochina

aged bothways. It was a suggestion even in BIMSTEC to establish a regional airline, with all the member-states taking a stake in it. But that is not going to help boost tourism in any way, because Thailand provides the air link already and that is not the stumbling block. The cultural links of India with Southeast Asia hardly need to be stressed. Apart from trade and Buddhism, many of the cultural art forms — from music and dance to architecture and customs — share a common history of evolution. The Indian epics are well known in that region and many countries such as Thailand and Indonesia have their own versions of the Ramayana. Providing better exposure to their dance forms could help in the preservation of not just the art but the survival of many artistes.

More than these, it is education which holds the key. Giving them more slots under India's ITEC programme of cooperation may not be the answer to all the problems. Be it in teaching English or computer literacy, there is a lot that India can do in Indochina to pull up the standards of education and skills. India already has an on-going programme of teaching English to some of the military personnel in the Indochina countries. Now is the time to widen the scope of this exercise so that a battery of Indian teachers could spread English in those countries to help them integrate with the rest of the region and the world. Computer education is an-

other area in which Indian expertise and experience will be very useful. It could also be a commercially viable project from some of the private computer education institutes here to set up shop in that region. Technical education again is an area that will be useful because countries such as Laos and Cambodia need to generate 'employable' manpower to begin the process of industrial development.

These are certainly areas in which India can help. But it is in the second phase that New Delhi can derive some benefits from MGC. It is the trans-Asian highway and railway that hold the key to an ultimate link up. India has to keep pushing for these projects, which can also be thrown up for international funding. The Bangkok-based ESCAP, a U.N. agency, has already carried out the basic study for these transport links and will be more than willing to assist in seeing them through. The trans-Asian railway could be the ultimate link to China, Russia and Central Asia, while the highway will bring immense benefits to the entire hinterland along the Mekong. The National Highways Authority of India, RITES and IRCON must get on with the job of mapping these major projects. The first link on the highway, connecting Myanmar, is expected to be launched by the year-end.

What is surprising is that agriculture does not figure in this cooperative framework. Since the Mekong basin has the potential to emerge as a granary and offers some of the most fertile (but highly prone to flooding) lands, there is a lot that India and Thailand can offer to tame the Mekong, enhance cultivation and spread irrigation. India could share the fruits of its Green Revolution as well as the benefits of weather forecasting to help the farmers. Creating the infrastructure first to improve the quality of agriculture and then for storage and transport can really bring about a comprehensive change in the life of those people.

It is sad but true that BIMSTEC has not taken off after three or four years, just as the Indian Ocean Rim initiative is weighed down by teething problems. It is entirely up to India to make at least the MGC succeed so that the historical links can be converted into a new partnership.

THE HINDU

7 4 201 200

The Myanmar Matrix

Back on the Road to Mandalay

By C UDAY BHASKAR

THE recently-concluded visit to Delhi (November 21) of General Maung Aye, the vice chairman of the State Peace and Development Council — the name for the ruling military government in Myanmar — is an important punctuation in India's evolving 'national interest policy' and both the form and the content of this visit have a strategic import.

Myanmar, or Burma as it was called till the name was changed in 1989 by the military rulers, is a blank in the collective Indian consciousness except for the persona of a determined Aung San Suu Kyi. It otherwise remains a curious mix of myth and forgotten memory deeply embedded in receding history, inextricably linked with the Indian subcontinent from ancient times to the modern period. Myanmar has had a chequered relationship with India in the literal sense of the term. Burma after colonisation was part of British India and the imprint of the Indian freedom struggle was evident in the growth of Burmese nationalism.

Burma was a major theatre during World War II and the leadership of the period — headed by General Aung San (father of Ms Suu Kyi) — has the unique distinction of shifting allegiance from Axis to Allied powers during the war. On attaining independence in January 1948, Burma was the model for the developing nation in Asia and identified as a state with the highest potential and promise.

However, the political evolution of Burma has been bloody and violent and in July 1947, General Aung San was assassinated by his opponents and the leadership devolved upon the first prime minister U Nu. Burma played a major role in the emerging Asian solidarity and relations between Delhi and Rangoon (now Yangon) were robust. A large Indian population in Burma provided the substance to the relationship and considerable trade flourished by way of Burmese teak, rice and gems between the Indian east coast and Rangapatnam — the vernacular world for Rangoon. India provided considerable support to U Nu in the early years when the state had to deal with insurgencies and sub-national militancy.

However post-1962, Burma's fortunes underwent a radical change. Growing internal unrest abetted by external forces and the inability of the civilian leadership to deal with this turbulence saw the military (tatmadaw) in the driver's seat. Then

followed a period of intense xenophobia and insularity that pushed the country into near isolation with a resultant downturn in ties with India. Domestic policies including the expulsion of ethnic Indians and later a closer Sino-Burmese axis soured the relationship with Delhi and for a quarter of a century till 1988 there was the equivalent of extended stasis.

Democratic zealotry in the Rajiv Gandhi years, the dramatic arrival of Aung San Suu Kyi on the Myanmar political landscape and the ruthlessness of the tatmadaw in the bloody repression of August 8, 1988 led to Delhi distancing itself visibly and the relationship was strained. But in 1993, India decided to repair the relationship as part of a larger 'look east' policy and seven years down the road Delhi is able to engage Yangon through a matrix that leavens pragmatic national interest considerations with regional and

leadership in Yangon while refusing to deal with that in Islamabad. The reality is that the former has over the last few years provided valuable support to the Indian national interest in the areas that impinge directly on sovereignty and territoriality. Myanmar troops have cooperated with Indian security forces in dealing with insurgencies in the North East, while in the Pakistani case, the military is doing the exact opposite. Thus the fidelity is to the core national interest.

Till recently, the relationship with Myanmar was perceived in terms of negative determinants and anxieties — particularly the growing links between Beijing and Yangon. There is no denying the fact that China has made considerable progress in establishing its presence in Myanmar over the last decade and on a visit to Mandalay a few years ago, the Sinic influence was more than palpable. Yes, Beijing provides attractive military support to the 350,000-strong Myanmar armed forces and the transport linkages with the Kunming region of China are a reality.

But in the current visit, General Maung assured his hosts that Yangon will not allow foreign military bases to be set up on Myanmar soil and made a counter offer which is of strategic significance. Currently, India has a \$ 196 million two-way trade relationship with Yangon but there is enormous potential to develop certain sectors such as energy (where it may be the only exporter in ASEAN), agriculture, light engineering goods and pharmaceuticals. Communication linkages are a constraint but the opening of the 160 km Tamu-Kalemyo road west of the Chindwin river will provide a crucial link with Mandalay. General Maung invited India to develop the Kyaupkyu port in the Ramree Island and this is an opportunity that must not be lost.

Myanmar is India's gateway to ASEAN and the recent Ganga-Mekong initiative testifies to India's determined intent to engage the region. Perhaps this visit will allow Myanmar to be seen in its own identity and not as part of the Chinese shadow. The challenge for the Indian professional in the public and private sector is to strengthen the relationship in a positive manner and counter the Chinese presence in a confident and competitive manner. The ball is now in India's court and ONGC amongst others would be well advised to pick up the gauntlet.

IN BRIEF

- The political evolution of Burma has been quite violent
- Myanmar's inclusion in ASEAN has led to a geo-strategic transformation as far as India is concerned
- Dealing with Myanmar's junta is not on a par with dealing with the military regime in Pakistan
- Myanmar has been cooperative in dealing with insurgencies in India's North East

global realities. Despite the opprobrium directed at Myanmar by the global community, it was admitted into the ASEAN fold in 1997 and this led to a dramatic geo-strategic transformation for India. ASEAN is no longer distant but now contiguous to the Indian mainland with four states in the North East bordering Myanmar.

India's geo-strategic interests are defined by the abiding existential challenge of China and the influence it exerts on the Indian periphery including Myanmar. While democracy remains a highly desirable goal where it does not exist, India does not have the option to make that the sole determinant in its external relations. Thus the present visit of General Maung raises a seeming contradiction about Delhi doing business with the military

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 NOV 2000

Stress on better policing of Indo-Myanmar border

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 4

HT-8
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EFFICIENT POLICING of the 1,600-km long Indo-Myanmar border, with a view to ending its present highly porous nature, figured in the talks between the visiting Home Minister of Myanmar, Colonel Tim Hlaing, and Mr L.K. Advani.

It was acknowledged that the National Socialist Council of Nagaland's (NSCN) militants usually wear uniforms similar to that worn by the Assam Rifles which led to the 'accident' last week in a border village in which two jawans of Myanmar's border police were killed. Col. Hlaing reiterated Myanmar's apology for the mix-up.

Many of the villages along the border have the international border running through them. The two delegations decided to tone up the pre-determined norms of patrolling of these areas so that such accidents do not recur. Cross-

border infrastructural linkages would be enhanced with a bridge across the Tiau river in the Mizoram sector.

India stresses that the rule of Myanmar by a military junta, which seized power in a coup, does not pose a hindrance to the relationship. "While we support democracy, India does not believe in interfering in the internal affairs of another country," a spokesman said.

External Affairs Ministry sources said the impact of the meeting goes beyond border policing as Colonel Tim is the second most powerful man in the ruling junta in Yangon.

Colonel Tim will also visit Hyderabad and Mumbai where he will inspect police and paramilitary training academies and visit information technology companies. Later in the day the Myanmar delegation visited the Central Bureau of Investigation headquarters and Central Forensic Sciences Laboratory.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 NOV 2000

Ganga-Mekong project launch on Nov. 10

NEW DELHI, NOV. 5. An ambitious Ganga-Mekong Suvannaphoom linkage project to promote tourism, culture and education between India and the Mekong Basin countries of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam would be formally launched in the Laotian capital of Vientiane on November 10.

The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, who leaves on a week-long tour of Vietnam and Laos tomorrow, would launch the project along with his counterparts from the five countries during their historic meeting.

A decision to launch the project was taken by the six Ministers at a meeting held on the margins of ASEAN post-Ministerial conference in Bangkok last July.

The project in its second phase is expected to take up cooperation among these countries in the transport and infrastructure sectors, including railways, roads and air travel as well as greater cooperation in science and technology and human resources, an External Affairs Ministry official said. Higher education and areas relevant to knowledge-based industries have been included on India's suggestion.

Cooperative efforts would draw on India's experience in IT and other high-technology areas, the official said. In the tourism sector, focus would be on promoting IT based on cultural resources and the common heritage of the region. The project envisages package tours focussing on Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the six countries.

"Given the commonalities of cultural traditions, including the Buddhist heritage, there is good scope for India and these countries to join hands to promote tourism as well as educational and cultural interaction," the official said. Revival of these links is expected to have tremendous mutual benefits for trade and commerce, tourism, science and technology and environmental conservation.

As most of the countries in the Mekong basin are relatively poor and conscious of the need to catch up with ASEAN standards of economic prosperity, there was tremendous potential for development projects based on the common culture, the official said.

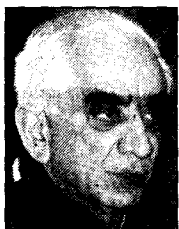
In Vietnam, Mr. Singh would attend the 10th meeting of the Indo-Vietnam joint commission to explore avenues for giving new thrust to the existing trade and economic ties between the two countries. Vietnam has been pressing for more Indian investments in various fields. Negotiations in this regard were underway at various levels, the spokesman said. Vietnamese leaders have publicly expressed their full support for New Delhi's stand on Kashmir, terming it a "sacred and integral part" of India and criticised Pakistan's interference in India's internal affairs. Vietnam also supports a permanent seat for India in an expanded UN Security Council. — PTI

THE HINDU

6 NOV 2000

Jaswant visit to boost ties with SE Asian nations

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA



Mr Jaswant Singh

NEW DELHI, Nov. 5. — India will begin a new chapter in its ties with Southeast Asian countries this week with the formal launch of the Ganga-Mekong Swarnabhoomi Linkage Project during external affairs minister Mr Jaswant Singh's visit to Vietnam and Laos starting tomorrow.

The Ganga-Mekong programme is aimed at boosting collaboration between India and the Mekong basin countries of Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

The cooperation, starting in the areas of culture, tourism and education, is envisaged to grow into partnership in vital infrastructure

areas like transport, railways, roads and travel besides science, information technology and human resource development.

The birth of the project was announced on the margins of the 33rd Asean Post Minister Conference in Bangkok in July this year. The formal inauguration in Vientiane, the capital Laos, on 10 November will be attended by the foreign ministers of the six member countries.

"India's interaction with these countries under this umbrella is expected to give a boost to trade and commercial ties and yield long-term benefits for the country," officials of the external affairs ministry say.

Given the cultural commonalities, there was scope for building up cooperation on infrastructure and transportation projects like the Escap's Asian Highway Project or an Asian Railway connecting India to the Mekong basin countries.

THE STATESMAN

6 NOV 2000

India and Vietnam set to forge closer bilateral ties

Shishir Gupta
Hanoi, November 6

INDIA AND Vietnam are set to substantiate their special relationship by forging closer economic, educational, military and energy linkages.

External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh who arrived here on a three-day visit, met Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien this evening.

This was followed by nearly 45 minutes of delegation level talks between the two sides.

Mr Singh described the talks as a "good discussion that focused on bilateral, political, regional and multilateral issues". He told mediapersons later that substantive discussions would take place during the 10th meeting of the Joint Commission, which begins tomorrow.

Mr Dy Nien, on his part, expressed satisfaction over the bilateral talks and said that India and Vietnam have a relationship that goes back a thousand years. "There is no need to stop...we have to find ways and means to further strengthen our relationship...we should fully cooperate with each other," the Vietnam Foreign

Minister said.

Mr Nein was obviously hinting at the greater need for cooperation between the two countries in areas of trade, information technology and infrastructure.

The bilateral trade between Indian and Vietnam was of the order of 155.49 million US dollars in the year 1999-2000. The balance of trade weighs heavily on India's side with exports to the tune of 143.82 million US dollars and imports at a modest 11.67 million US dollars.

It is believed that during the talks, the two sides discussed ways to expand trade as well as possible new tie-ups in the information technology, mining, agriculture and hydrocarbon sector.

With India expected to become the fourth largest consumer of energy this decade, New Delhi is already drawing plans for procurement of oil and gas from the hydrocarbon rich enclaves.

While much of the attention so far paid on procuring oil and gas from Middle East or central Asia, India is now looking afresh at procurement of these most essential commodities from South-East Asia.

Vietnam, which has the third

largest reserves of crude oil in the region, is one such opportunity. The bulk of Vietnamese crude goes to Japan, but of late Hanoi is thinking of diversifying its market.

India and Vietnam are already negotiating on supply of crude oil and in case there is a firm tie-up, it will give a major boost to the bilateral trade.

It is understood that Reliance Corporation along with Shell are negotiating with Petro Vietnam for supply of crude to the former's refinery at Jamnagar in Gujarat. The ONGC Videsh has also signed an agreement with its Vietnamese counterpart for extracting offshore oil.

Another area where the two sides are expected to exchange notes in the next two days is military relationship. India and Vietnam are yet to explore the full potential in this sphere.

Hanoi watchers feel that there is considerable scope for military-hardware tie-up between the two countries, as both have considerable stockpiles of erstwhile Soviet Union equipment.

This sphere is of vital importance as India is in a position to render product support to Vietnam's naval and air assets.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 NOV 2000

Jaswant upbeat about ties with Vietnam

By Amit Baruah

HANOI, NOV. 6. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, arrived here today on a three-day bilateral visit to Vietnam — signalling a new warmth in bilateral relations. The tour will also take him to Laos where he will inaugurate the six-nation Ganga-Mekong-Swarnabhumi project — involving India, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar — for enhanced cooperation in the areas of tourism, culture and education.

Talking to reporters after a preliminary round of talks, Mr. Singh and his Vietnamese counterpart, Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien, sounded upbeat about the state of bilateral ties. The Vietnamese Minister said he had “very good talks” with Mr. Singh. India and Vietnam’s relations dated back “thousands of years”. There was no need to “make a start” in the relationship; it had “started” some time ago. “Now, we have to find ways and means to further strengthen our relationship.”

Mr. Singh, on his part, “fully corroborated” his Vietnamese colleague’s statement. “It is a matter of very great honour for

me to be here... we just had very good discussions covering bilateral, political, regional and international issues and I look forward very much to substantive discussions tomorrow in the Joint Commission meeting.”

The visit to Hanoi comes at a time when Vietnam has assumed charge as the new head of the ASEAN Standing Committee at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) held in Bangkok in July.

According to sources, Mr. Singh will discuss a number of issues — including the contentious issue of Fiji. As Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee, Vietnam has some influence in the region, and India aims to use it to press Fiji in the direction of multi-racial stability.

Mr. Singh will meet the Defence Minister, Mr. Pham Van Tra, tomorrow and call on the President, Mr. Tran Duc Luong, on Wednesday. The 10th session of the India-Vietnam Joint Commission will be inaugurated tomorrow; which will deliberate on different areas of bilateral cooperation. The JCM, set up in 1982, has met nine times — alternately in New Delhi and Hanoi.

Indo-Vietnam ties have their

firm roots in history. New Delhi was unstinting in support during Vietnam’s involvement in Cambodia beginning in 1978 and even drew flak from the Western world.

Today, both countries enjoy a unique equation. Vietnam, along with Laos and Cambodia, effectively blocked Pakistan’s bid to secure membership of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) during the last AMM in Bangkok.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, “there is a close identity of views” between the two countries on several international issues. “Vietnam has expressed full support for India’s candidature for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council.”

“The close relations between India and Vietnam have their historical roots in the common struggle for liberation from colonial rule. The relatively recent contacts include the Prime Minister, Mr. Narasimha Rao’s visit to Vietnam in September 1994, former Prime Minister of Vietnam, Mr. Vo Van Kiet’s visit to India in January 1997, the Vietnamese President, Mr. Tran Duc Long’s visit in December 1999 and the External Affairs Minister, Mr. I. K.

Gujral’s visit to the fourth session of the India-Vietnam Joint Commission in April 1990...” the statement added.

The Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, visited Hanoi from March 27-30 this year and signed an “agreed minute” identifying the areas of cooperation in the defence field.

Bilateral trade totalled \$155.49 million in 1999-2000; with India’s exports to Vietnam being \$143.32 million. India has a number of investment projects in Vietnam. The Nagarjuna group has set up a \$26-million sugar reprocessing plant, an RPG Group company, KEC International, has entered into a \$7-million joint venture to manufacture components for electricity transmission while KCP Ltd has a sugar manufacturing unit in Hue.

In addition, the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation is involved in off-shore oil and natural gas exploration in southern Vietnam. The two countries also have a Joint Business Council — comprising the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Vietnam Chambers of Commerce.

THE HINDU

7 NOV 2000

Vietnam backs India for APEC membership

By Amit Baruah

HANOI, NOV. 7. Vietnam, an enthusiastic supporter of India's candidature in the United Nations Security Council, has now openly backed its membership of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) grouping which holds its annual summit in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, on November 15-16.

As the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, and his Vietnamese counterpart, Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien, inaugurated the 10th session of the India-Vietnam Joint Commission meeting, the State-run Vietnam News made it apparent that Hanoi was open and consistent in its support for New Delhi.

"Nien hailed India's efforts to strengthen ties with regional countries and upgrade the role of the Non-Aligned Movement... these efforts had helped to lift India's standing on the world stage, Nien said which would receive a

APD-14 further boost if India's U.N. and APEC ambitions are realised," the paper reported.

India has been trying to garner support for entering the grouping. Clearly, with one of the largest economies — the APEC can hardly be complete without India's entry.

Speaking to reporters today, Mr. Singh said India-Vietnam relations were given a certain direction and shape in the early 1950s by "two great leaders" — Ho Chi Minh and Jawaharlal Nehru. "But we are now in the 21st century and it will not suffice for us to think only of the past and not of the challenges both countries face as the new world impinges on politics... this is the real dimension of the challenge to give direction to India-Vietnam relations... and that is why I am here."

In his opening statement at the Joint Commission meeting, the Vietnamese Minister said both the countries should make greater

efforts to "explore our vast potential for cooperation to strengthen and further improve the efficiency of economic cooperation commensurate with our very good and close political relations".

The two-way trade was a meagre \$115.49 million in 1999-2000 while Hanoi's trade with Beijing is pegged at \$2 billion annually. The trade balance, too, is heavily in India's favour; a situation Vietnam would like to rectify.

Mr. Nien said India should formulate a policy to facilitate increased and diversified imports. Apart from looking at traditional goods such as rice, pepper, footwear and silk yarn, India should consider giving tax reduction or exemption for Vietnamese handicrafts.

The two countries needed to further boost trade promotion activities, and increase the exchange of business delegations and participation in trade fairs and exhibitions. India should fa-

cilitate the early establishment of Vietnam's Trade Centre in New Delhi as agreed upon earlier.

Appreciating India's decision to make available a renewable credit line for import of machinery and equipment for food processing projects, transport and metallurgy, Mr. Nien said there was need to expedite the disbursement of two new loans.

On cooperation in education and training, he said: "We are delighted at the fruitful outcome of our bilateral cooperation and wish to receive more assistance from the Indian Government in the training of our people in those pioneering industries such as information technology, new materials, renewable energy, and use of nuclear power for peaceful and development purposes."

In his remarks, Mr. Singh said Mr. Nien had ably charted out the kind of activity the countries needed to be engaged in.

THE HINDU

8 NOV 2000

Jaswant's Vietnam, Laos visit to focus on 'Indian' element

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KEITH FLORY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

HANOI, Nov. 7. — Reinjecting the "Indian" element into what was once known as Indochina is the focus of Indian diplomatic activity this week. In some contrast to its inevitable engagement of the affluent West, the thrust is currently directed towards the developing nations of South-east Asia with the External Affairs Minister visiting Vietnam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, or Laos as most Indians know it.

There are ancient civilisational links of culture and religion between India and this region, the "historic and traditional ties" that the diplomats never fail to highlight. Yet history, it is being realised, will not suffice in the present global context to sustain an effective and meaningful relationship. Political goodwill has to be translated into an economic dimension.

More so in Vietnam where the past is revered but essentially as the base upon which to build the future. The struggles of its people against Chinese, French and

American domination are not portrayed merely as past glories, the spirit of determination that overcome supposedly superior powers is being channelised into what is called "Doi Moi", national renovation.

It is against that backdrop that the External Affairs Minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, and Vietnam's Foreign Minister, Mr Nguyen Dzy Nien, have sought to shape the interaction of the 10th meeting of the Joint Commission which opened here this morning. Success or failure will be determined by what takes place on the ground, not the sweet talk that would be customary on such occasions.

Mr Jaswant Singh was forthright, the challenge was to "reinvigorate the relations in the context of contemporary realities", he told reporters. The many centuries of civilisational affinity, the warmth shared by Nehru and Ho Chi Minh had to brought into harmony with what obtains in the 21st Century. He hoped the current engagement would "impart a new sense of dynamism".

Opening the meeting of the Joint Commission, the Vietnamese Foreign Minister expressed his appreciation of

now heavily in India's favour. India must diversify its imports, create business opportunities, and the agreement to open a Vietnamese trade centre in New Delhi must be implemented quickly.

Disbursement of the two credit lines in place, measures to get Indian companies to sign and implement contracts in which debt repayments are adjusted against commodity imports from Vietnam was another suggestion. He called for investments in priority areas: telecom, transport, agro-products, software technology.

Development of the hydrocarbons sector was another critical area said the minister, even as he recognised India's assistance in the development of human resources which he felt could be further augmented. It was clear that he knew what his country sought and expected from India, even as appreciated India's economic reform programme.

Responding to his host, Mr Jaswant Singh said that the Joint Commission should set the course for the future and he wanted it to decide on specific projects that could be initiated before Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee visits

here early next year. India would be more than happy to make available all its expertise and experience to Vietnam, he declared.

Recalling the achievements of cooperation in rice research, Mr Jaswant Singh said that it must be the benchmark for future action. He agreed that there was need for major action on the trade front and suggested that the process would be facilitated if India could open banking channels in Vietnam. Indian consultancy services could also be used to greater effect.

Mr Jaswant Singh's announcement that India was contributing medicines worth three-and-a-half million rupees for the victims of the major floods that hit this country recently was deeply appreciated by his counterpart.

Talking around the officials' circle here reveals a feeling that while Vietnam does look towards India for help in national renovation, a feeling of some regret is expressed that India's business community is yet to realise the potential in mutual beneficial ventures. And with political relations now being economy driven, a certain void exists. Which others are only too keen to fill.



Jaswant: shaping interaction

Indian assistance and support down the years, but lost no time in getting down to specifics. The volume of trade had to be raised, and so also the imbalance that was

'Diplomacy not aimed at China'

KEITH FLORY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE



Mr Jaswant Singh

HANOL, Nov. 8. — India's current diplomatic initiatives in South-east Asia are not directed against anybody and the Ganga-Mekong linkage endeavour to be launched later this year is not an attempt to counter China's influence in the region, the external affairs minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, asserted here today.

It would be misleading to rush to such conclusions because the Yunnan province was not included in the forth-

coming meeting in Vientiane, he told a press conference after the conclusion of the 10th meeting of the Indo-Vietnamese Joint Commission.

The grouping of India, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam is "an organisation not directed against anyone, replacing anyone; it is not a formal grouping". The countries are bound by ties of history and culture and are now trying to foster cooperation in education, tourism, culture, science and technology and the development of infrastructure, the minister emphasised.

India's participating in the Mekong basin cooperative exercise is only in support of an existing arrangement and "challenges nobody; it is an affirmation of geographical

and cultural links".

Asked about India adopting a "look east policy", he said the term had been used by Mr PV Narasimha Rao and said it was inevitable that India looked in that direction. Every morning, thousands of Indians looked that way during worship.

In taking such a categorical position, Mr Jaswant Singh was addressing a political issue of regional significance for there is indeed much sensitivity here to any suggestion of India desiring to use its relations with these countries as a counter-weight to China. None of these nations wish to be drawn into that kind of an equation.

The minister expressed much satisfaction at his meetings with the Vietnamese leadership and noted that President

Tran Duc Long had spoken of his relations with India as being of "strategic importance". Both countries attached a great deal of importance on imparting a "new dynamic" to the relations.

The economic content of that relationship has to be given further impetus, particularly in correcting the trade imbalance that is currently heavily weighed in India's favour. Mr Singh said that the joint commission had been directed to work towards that. Mining, financial services, information technology and the hydrocarbons sector had been identified for action.

Pointing out that his visit to Vietnam came at an appropriate point — between the Vietnamese President's visit to

India and Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit here early next year — Mr Singh spoke of the "firm and assured quality" of bilateral relations.

He was highly appreciative of Vietnam having reiterated its support to India's bid for a permanent place in a reformed UN Security Council. The two countries would also be working "more cooperatively" in international fora, he said.

The meeting of the joint commission has been "highly successful" and he stressed that he was not speaking in terms of the atmosphere alone because firm decisions had been taken in various economic spheres for "deepening the scope of bilateral relations mindful of the challenges of the new century".

Strengthening India-Singapore ties

By V. Jayanth

HD-19 9/11
NEW DELHI, NOV. 8. After a gap of nearly three decades, an Indian head of state, will again visit Singapore, when the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, arrives in the city-state late on Thursday night.

The year began with a visit to India by the Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong. And before the year-end, Mr. Narayanan will add yet another dimension to an already strong and dynamic relationship.

In the 1990s, after India opened up her economy, Mr. Goh made two visits in successive years. The then Prime Minister, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, returned the visit as part of New Delhi's 'Look East' policy. As a result of those exchanges and a growing India-Southeast Asia interaction, New Delhi gained the dialogue partnership with ASEAN in 1996. There has been no looking back since, though the East Asian crisis did slacken the pace of economic

cooperation. Mr. Narayanan, will exchange views with his Singapore counterpart, Mr. S. R. Nathan, on a wide range of regional and global issues. Mr. Goh and the Senior Minister, Mr. Leek Kuan Yew, will also call on Mr. Narayanan and discuss recent developments, including at the bilateral level. The President, who is accompanied by the Minister for Tourism and Culture, Mr. Ananth Kumar, four Members of Parliament and a team of officials, will be in the city-state from November 9 to 13.

At special briefing for the media accompanying the President here today, Mr. S.T. Devare, Secretary, Economic Relations, Ministry of External Affairs, said frequent high-level exchange of visits had marked the relationship, with each visit adding a new dimension.

Apart from meeting Singapore's leaders, the President will interact with intellectuals and visit some development and tourist

landmarks. During Mr. Goh's visit last January, the two sides agreed to set up task forces on IT and economic cooperation. While the IT initiative took off, with a high-level IT delegation visiting Singapore earlier this year, a Memorandum of Understanding on economic cooperation was expected to be finalised soon.

Having completed the flagship project — the IT park near Bangalore — investors in Singapore were looking at other proposals. The financial, infrastructure, transport and tourism sectors remained the major attractions and recently, SingTel signed a deal with Bharati telecom for a joint venture. Development of ports and the power sector were in the pipeline.

Despite the regional economic crisis and a slowdown, bilateral trade, Mr. Devare said, maintained a steady increase, crossing the \$ 2 billion mark. The trade was very much in Singapore's favour. Many Chief Ministers from

India, mainly from the southern States, had already visited the city-state and were actively wooing investors.

From Singapore's viewpoint, there was not just a desire for strengthening and deepening the relationship, but officials and investors would like to see things happen quickly. After the controversy over Singapore Airlines taking a stake in India's domestic airline died down with the new aviation policy ruling out the possibility, the airline was looking at the prospect of bidding for a stake in Air India, when the promised disinvestment occurred.

Considering the President's vast experience, particularly in foreign policy and diplomacy, this could not be seen as just another state visit. Given the striking similarities between Mr. Narayanan and Mr. Nathan, it is quite possible that a new "personal chemistry" between them could impart a fresh dynamism to an already close partnership.

THE HINDU

9 NOV 1996

Bilateral trade back on growth track: envoy

By V. Jayanth

CHENNAI, APRIL 11. Despite the East Asian economic crisis, bilateral trade between India and Indonesia has not suffered. Except for a slide in 1998, it appears to be back on the growth track, according to the Indonesian Ambassador to India, Mr. Zakaria Soemintaatmadja.

He said in an interview here today that bilateral trade had reached \$1.3 billion last year and the balance was in favour of Indonesia.

Mr. Soemintaatmadja, who was here as part of a 'familiarisation' tour of south India, explained that the main exports from India were iron ore pellets, aluminium ores and concentrates, cotton and cotton yarn, rice, animal feed, chemicals and dyes, machinery and parts.

The imports from Indonesia consisted of ammonia, urea, textile yarn and fabrics, coal, non-ferrous metals, pulp and waste paper, palm oil, cashew nuts, wood and wood products, raw material and chemicals.

The Indonesian envoy argued that there

was "tremendous scope and potential" for enhancing bilaterally economic cooperation. Both the Governments had realised this and were clearing the decks for a mutually beneficial partnership.

He noted that during the February visit of Indonesian President, Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, a couple of agreements and MoUs were signed.

In a tie-up between Mitra Jaya and IRCON, the Indian Railway Construction Corporation, to undertake the construction and laying of an 80 km line in Sumatra. This was a counter-trade agreement for the purchase of palm oil from Indonesia. The railway line would facilitate the transportation of palm oil.

Another area of cooperation identified

was tourism. People in both countries would be encouraged to visit the other and the arrival of Indian tourists in Indonesia was steadily on the rise.

Though Garuda Indonesia, the national airline, was planning to fly to India, all expansion plans were cancelled because of the economic crisis. Air India was still flying to Jakarta.

Mr. Soemintaatmadja, who took over in New Delhi this January, argued that both India and Indonesia had been looking to the U.S., Europe and Japan for trade all these years.

Since South and Southeast Asia had a lot in common and now realised the potential for economic cooperation, he was confident that trade and investment ties would improve substantially in the years ahead. The countries would also enhance coordination in the regional and international fora.

The Indonesian envoy, who called on the Tamil Nadu Governor on Monday and also met top industrialists and businessmen here, briefed them on the current developments in his country.

The Ambassador assured the business community that the Wahid Government was "quite stable" and determined to take the country forward.

"If the situation was fluid or volatile, how can the President be travelling abroad so often. Even now he is out on a visit to South Africa, Mexico and Japan", he added.

Conceding that there were pockets of violence in Aceh and Irian Jaya for instance, he said foreign investments were once again coming into Indonesia. Because of the past experience, they would take their time to study the situation and reassure themselves that their investments would be safe.

Stability was already in sight, both on the economic and political fronts, though it would take some time for the social and political tensions to die down.

He said Tamil Nadu had very close trade and cultural links with Indonesia and a sizeable population of Tamil origin was resident in Medan and Surabaya. Many professionals from the State had taken up jobs in and around Jakarta.



Mr. Zakaria Soemintaatmadja

THE HINDU

21 APR 2000

India may bank on Vietnamese guerrilla tactics, says George

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

HANOI, March 26. — India is exploring possibilities of drawing upon the expertise of the Vietnamese Army in jungle warfare and guerrilla tactics to confront insurgency movements in North-east, Kashmir and Naxalite-affected areas, the defence minister, Mr George Fernandes, said here today.

"Vietnamese have a lot of experience in jungle warfare and in guerrilla tactics and we are seeing whether we can draw from their experience," remarked Mr Fernandes, heading a high-level defence delegation on his five-day visit which began today.

Mr Fernandes, the first Indian defence minister to visit Vietnam, said besides having Vietnamese guerrilla experts to train Indian security forces, he would also be taking up with his counterpart here efforts to get Army personnel train in Vietnam on counter insurgency tactics.

The main focus of his visit would be to initiate

a high-level security dialogue particularly on proposals to confront growing piracy in high seas in the Asia-Pacific region.

"We already have a defence protocol and the time has now come to expand its scope as also to exploit the full potential of the existing business linkages," the minister said soon after his arrival. Mr Fernandes, whose visit closely follows US defence secretary William Cohen's trip, said concern over piracy on sea lanes were expressed by all states of the region and Japan had asked for active cooperation from India on the matter. The defence minister will be calling upon the Vietnamese President, Mr Tran Duc Luong, Prime Minister Mr Phan Van Khai besides holding two rounds of official talks with his Vietnamese counterpart Lt-General Pham Van Tra. He will also meet foreign minister Dr Nguyen Dy Nien.

Mr Fernandes said the two countries would also discuss other issues like Vietnamese interests in buying more defence related equipment from India and holding of joint exercises.

THE STATESMAN
27 MAR 2000

India, Vietnam to seal defence pact

M.K. Tikku
Hanoi, March 27

INDIA AND Vietnam today reached an agreement on wide-ranging defence cooperation, including training of personnel and exchange of information. The document, details of which were being worked out till late evening, is expected to be signed on Tuesday.

Defence Minister George Fernandes, who led the Indian delegation, and his Vietnamese counterpart, Lt. Gen. Pham Van Tra, agreed that the agreement should mark the beginning of a "strategic dialogue" between the two sides. The Vietnamese delegation reiterated their Government's support for India as a permanent member in the UN Security Council.

The Indian side offered to assist Vietnam with its know-how in tackling the after-effects of chemical warfare. The Vietnamese dele-

gation had pointed out that an increasing part of its defence budget was being spent in financing rehabilitation of tens of thousands affected by long years of war, apart from the more than three lakh Vietnamese still reported "missing in action".

The Vietnamese Government offered to provide training to Indian defence personnel in jungle warfare to help tackle insurgency, especially in the Northeast. The suggestion mooted sometime earlier could not be implemented since the trainers at the Vietnamese School of Jungle Warfare could not speak in English. India now proposed to build a faculty of Vietnamese language teaching staff at the Venkateshwar University at Tirupati for teaching the defence staff.

The two countries discussed security perceptions in their neighbourhoods and agreed to work for

peace and stability in the region. The two Governments have agreed to continue "security exchanges" bilaterally as well as through the Asean Regional Forum.

Sources said that work on plans to set up the Ho Chin Minh Nehru Nuclear Research Centre at Dalat in central Vietnam was already underway. The 600,000-dollar project was expected to be inaugurated later this year.

At a meeting with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Bian, Mr Fernandes conveyed the Indian Government's willingness to strengthen bilateral economic relations. India said it was willing to increase the volume of imports from Vietnam to correct the trade imbalance.

Mr Bian appreciated India's offer to send experts for undertaking restoration and conservation work at the temples of the Chamb era in the central provinces.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 MAR 2000

India must not ignore S.E. Asia: Fernandes

HANOI, MARCH 27. The Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, has said India must firm up strategic ties with key ASEAN and Asia-Pacific countries, including Vietnam and Indonesia, adding that neglect of this would be at New Delhi's "own peril".

Stating that India has neighbours who "may be more difficult", he said Hanoi and Jakarta had strongly voiced the need for closer relationship with New Delhi and "we must respond to these to give a greater strategic depth to ties in the region."

Mr. Fernandes, who addressed the Indian community in Vietnam here on Sunday night, said New Delhi had neglected relations with its traditional allies in South-East Asia and India "would be closing its eyes to the region at its own peril".

The Minister, whose visit leading Thai daily *Bangkok Post* said was closely watched by Beijing, did not make any direct reference to China but said India "has to learn to live with its neighbours even though they may be more difficult".

Describing Hanoi as New Delhi's "most trusted friend and al-

ly", Mr. Fernandes said when India got flak from all over the world after the 1998 nuclear tests, Vietnam "stood by us" because "they understand that if we went nuclear there were good security reasons for it".

Mr. Fernandes, the first Indian Defence Minister to visit Vietnam, termed as "breakthrough" the recent visit to New Delhi by the Indonesian President, Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, and said, "we have to ask why our eyes are turned to the West and not to our neighbours."

Defence pact

India and Vietnam will sign an agreement tomorrow paving the way for institutionalising military cooperation between the two countries with Hanoi to train Indian Army officers in jungle warfare and counter-insurgency.

The agreement to be signed by Mr. Fernandes and his Vietnamese counterpart, Senior Lt. Gen. Pham Van Tra, would provide for regular exchange of security perceptions and Intelligence and visits by top military brass, official sources said here today. — PTI

THE HINDU

28 MAR 2000

India, Vietnam sign wide-ranging defence pact

HANOI: India and Vietnam on Tuesday signed a wide-ranging defence agreement paving the way for greater military to military cooperation, sale of advanced military light helicopters, assistance in repair and overhaul of Hanoi's mainstay MIG fighters and raising the level of military contacts between the two countries.

The defence cooperation agreement signed at the conclusion of the visit of the defence minister George Fernandes to the Vietnamese capital also provides a framework for periodical dialogue between the defence ministers of the two countries and cooperation between the Indian Coast Guard and Vietnamese sea-police in combating the growing menace of piracy in eastern seas.

After the agreement was signed by senior officials of the two countries in the presence of Gen Fernandes and his Vietnamese counterpart Gen Pham Van Tra, the defence minister described it as "most significant".

"Through this agreement we have sought to raise defence contacts between the two countries to a much higher and larger plane," Mr Fernandes told newsmen, adding that under the new pact, India would also assist Vietnam in repair and upgradation and building of warships and fast patrol crafts as well as training of technical personnel of the Vietnamese navy, sea police and air force pilots and technicians.

Mr Fernandes who leaves on Wednesday morning for Ho Chi Minh city wound up his visit to Hanoi with a "warm" meeting with the Vietnamese President Tran Duc Luong during which the latter commented that Vietnam and India should continue to support each other in all regional and international fora.

Under the new pact, Vietnam has offered to admit Indian armed

done by DRDO to assist Vietnam to combat the fall-out of chemical warfare particularly 'Agent Orange', which according to Vietnamese officials was affecting even third generation children of the war with the United States.

Earlier, during his 45-minute meeting with Mr Luong, Mr Fernandes apprised him of the security situation in the South Asian region particularly on the continued external support to terrorism in India.

He also thanked the Vietnamese for supporting India's candidature for the United Nations security council.

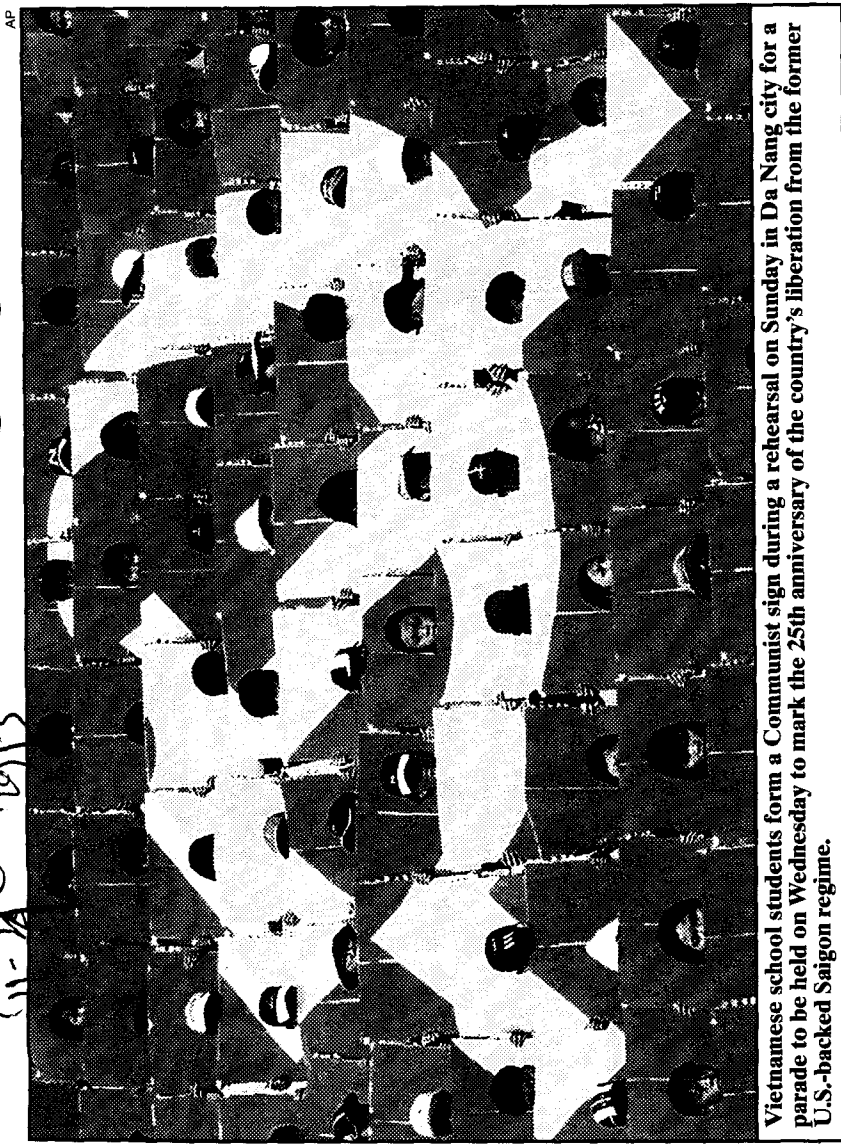
He also told the Vietnamese President that the Indian government would do all to give impetus to movement of Indian businessmen and investment into Vietnam.

Mr Fernandes also announced that Vietnam's default penal interest payment amounting to over Rs 10.4 crore would be re-ploughed back to Hanoi for restoration of seventh century Cham Temples in central Vietnam, a gesture warmly welcomed by the Vietnamese.

The Cham temples near the Da Nang region have been declared as world heritage site by the UNESCO and were built by the Chola emperors from eastern India of perfectly made bricks which have stood the ravages of war and elements for centuries.

Mr Fernandes said that India understood the current budget constraints being experienced by Vietnam and that the two countries had agreed to ensure that the cooperation under the new defence pact was undertaken at what he called "optimum price for the Vietnamese".

The defence minister concluded by saying that the new pact with Vietnam to guard against piracy in eastern seas would act as a great deterrent to the growing menace of piracy in arms and drug sales. (PTI)



Vietnamese school students form a Communist sign during a rehearsal on Sunday in Da Nang city for a parade to be held on Wednesday to mark the 25th anniversary of the country's liberation from the former U.S.-backed Saigon regime.

most use hundred per cent erst- while Soviet Union weaponry had also agreed to study the catalogue of the Ordnance Factory Board and explore possibilities of using the products and services being provided by India's defence manufacturing industries.

Under the new defence pact, India has increased the slots being offered for training in higher armed command courses for Vietnamese army and to carry out joint hydrographic surveys for which a technical team from the Vietnamese navy would soon visit India.

The overhaul and upgradation project from the Vietnamese air force would be a major project for

forces personnel for training in the field of jungle warfare and to get this project underway speedily, the Vietnamese army has offered training in their language to Indian officers selected for the warfare course.

With the proposed sale of multi-role advanced light helicopters, Vietnam would be the second major foreign buyer of the HAL, which is yet to enter service with the Indian Air Force or aviation wing of the army.

Through no numbers were specified, Mr Fernandes said this would depend on the requirements and availability of resources with the Vietnamese.

He said the Vietnamese which al-

opened the doors of the research

India has also agreed to assist Vietnam in the process of setting up of its defence industry and also

opened the doors of the research

Wahid visit to nudge Delhi, Jakarta closer

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Feb. 2: India has invited Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid on a two-day state visit from February 8 as part of its move to strengthen democratic traditions and improve its ties with Southeast Asia.

An Islamic scholar, Wahid is also a respected moderate who came to power in the first democratic elections in Indonesia in 30 years.

He will get a chance to meet not only President K.R. Narayanan — his host here — but also Prime

Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and other senior leaders of the BJP-led government.

Despite being founder-members of the Non-Aligned Movement and sharing warm and friendly relations in the early 50s, bilateral ties cooled in the next few decades when Delhi moved towards the Soviet camp and Jakarta became close to the US and the Western bloc. An attempt is being made to revive the warm ties and close cooperation that the two sides had in the past.

Wahid will be accompanied by a large business delegation, con-

sisting of 65 to 70 members. He will address the Fici and interact with the captains of Indian industry. Besides the President and the Prime Minister, Wahid will hold talks with foreign minister Jaswant Singh and human resources development minister Murlidhar Joshi.

India attaches great importance to Wahid's visit not only because it will be the first presidential visit from Indonesia since 1994, but as it will also indicate Delhi's desire to strengthen its ties with Southeast Asia.

Indonesia is a key player in the

region and an important member of the Asean. India is a full dialogue partner in the Asean and a member of the ARF — the region's security forum.

Besides the desire to strengthen economic ties, India is interested in Indonesia at the political and strategic level. Jakarta is the fourth largest country in the world and shares a long maritime boundary with Delhi. Moreover, despite being a Muslim majority country, Indonesia is known for its secular credentials and its non-interference in the Kashmir dispute.



Abdurrahman Wahid. (AFP)

An important visitor

By Vinod C. Khanna

189.12 ✓

7/2

THERE ARE many reasons why a good and close relationship with Indonesia should always be a significant element in India's foreign policy. One look at the map and its strategic importance to India's maritime interests becomes obvious; the archipelago stretches all the way from our Nicobar islands to the neighbourhood of Australia and commands entrance to such vital waterways as the Strait of Malacca. Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population whose leadership has always sought to preserve and protect the secular polity. Indonesia is rich in natural resources including petroleum. With the world's fourth largest population, it is potentially a huge market. Through history, India has had close cultural relations with Indonesia. And, their independence struggles had great mutual sympathy.

In actual fact, the relations between the nations, which became independent more or less simultaneously, had a chequered history during the tumultuous Sukarno years. There were moments of intense cooperation climaxed by the Bandung conference; in sharp contrast, there were periods when Sukarno flirted with China and Pakistan. But all that is now a distant memory. The relations already stabilised during the Suharto era which lasted for over three decades. Today there is little danger of Jakarta joining Beijing and/or Islamabad in any anti-India axis. The Suharto Government had some apprehensions about India's close relations with the Soviet Union. India's recognition of the Heng Samrin Government in Phnom Penh was a further irritant, though this was truer of other ASEAN members than of Indonesia. However, bilaterally, cordial relations were maintained. Visits were exchanged at the highest level. Economic relations grew. The two countries cooperated in the Non-Aligned Movement. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the resolution of the Cambodian recognition problem, a new chapter opened, symbolised by the invitation to India to become a dialogue partner of the ASEAN and invitee to the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Indonesia is far and away the largest member of the ASEAN and plays an active role in determining its policies without ever seeking to impose its will on its smaller

partners. There is something quite remarkable about how the ASEAN has gone about constructing a multi-layered edifice to ensure peace and security in the region. It has invited all external powers to be partners in a stable equilibrium in which each of the U.S., China and Japan — which could become an overwhelming hegemonic presence — is counterbalanced by the other two. They have been happy to invite India as a useful element in this complex but balanced structure. Their hope is that in the long-run India would function as some sort of counterweight to China.

Last year Indonesia became the world's third largest democracy and second largest in the developing world, making it a natural

Indonesia — Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity — but also his reverence for Mahatma Gandhi, of whose life and thought he has been a keen student.

Mr. Wahid has been accused of being eccentric, erratic and cunning. Clearly, he is neither a conventional politician nor a standard religious leader. He is shrewd rather than cunning. He dares to say what he believes, which trait sometimes makes him sound eccentric. He is not always consistent but he has to respond to a changing reality and to new ideas.

Some would have been happier had Ms. Megawati Sukarnoputri been elected President. But most people familiar with Indonesian politics would say the People's

Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid's upcoming visit presents India with an unprecedented opportunity to build a special relationship with a country with immense potential importance for its interests.

9. 5. 00 ✓

ural ideological partner of India. All these factors would have made the visit to Delhi of any Indonesian President an event of substantial importance for Indian foreign policy. That this post is now occupied by a remarkable man, who has long been a friend of India, invests the upcoming visit of Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid with an even greater significance.

A section of the Western media reacted negatively to his election, dismissing him as "a half-blind Muslim cleric." This is profoundly misleading. True, he heads what is perhaps the largest Muslim organisation in the world, the 30-million-strong Nahdlat-ul Ulama. But that does not make him some sort of fundamentalist mullah, busy issuing obscurantist fatwas. He is an illustrious product of the unique history of the tolerant Javanese Islam: a true Muslim, who respects all religions and is indeed exceedingly well-informed of them. Almost the first function he attended after assuming presidency was an all-religion prayer meeting in Bali, organised by the Gandhian, Ibu Oka (who like most Balinese is a Hindu). This was an occasion for him to reiterate not only his respect for all the other religions with adherents in

movements elsewhere. Mr. Wahid certainly does not want any further disintegration of his country.

Mr. Wahid and Ms. Megawati have also to direct into positive channels the explosive energy of the student community which rightly claims credit for overthrowing the Suharto regime and now demands aggressively, if not always realistically, instantaneous and sweeping action on issues such as corruption.

One respect in which the situation has worsened over the last few weeks is the Muslim-Christian rioting in the province of Maluku. Its capital, Ambon, has seen a horrendous level of communal violence. Also very worrisome is the danger of the contagion spreading to other parts.

Perhaps the most disastrous ingredient of the 1998 riots which brought down Gen. Suharto was the targeting of the Chinese community. Quite apart from the human dimensions of the tragedy, this has had a lethal effect on the economy which was already devastated by an unfortunate combination of external and domestic factors. The country has been deprived of the resources and skills of the Chinese business families, many of which have been resident in Indonesia for generations. Mr. Wahid knows that he has to restore their confidence and attract them back. This is one of the main reasons why the first country which he visited outside the ASEAN was China.

But to assume that Mr. Wahid feels closer to China than India would be inaccurate. On purely pragmatic grounds he would like Indonesia to have good relations with China. Indeed in his review of foreign affairs in 1999, the Foreign Minister, Mr. Alwi Shihab, declared that Indonesia intended forging a strong, strategic political partnership with China, India and other East Asian states to balance Western domination on international fora. But India has a very special place in Mr. Wahid's heart. All in all, his visit has a much greater significance than is generally appreciated in India. It presents India with an unprecedented opportunity to build a special relationship with a country with immense potential importance for its interests.

(The writer is a former Ambassador to Indonesia.)

Wahid for better ties with India

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 8

PRESIDENT OF Indonesia Abdurrahman Wahid, fighting an increasingly complex pro-democracy battle in his country, today chose to emphasise the relevance of relations with India, the world's largest democracy.

In his 40-minute discussions with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee this afternoon, he underscored the importance of abiding relations with "friends like India," which were particularly relevant in "difficult" times.

The President, at the fag end of a 13-nation tour, had plenty of reasons to be worried with his rene-

gade Minister and former army chief Gen. Wiranto finally breaking his week-long silence and serving notice that in complete defiance of Mr Wahid's instruction he was not going to resign from his Cabinet post.

Earlier in the day, a little after his arrival this morning, President Wahid told reporters that while he would not sack Gen. Wiranto, he would ask him to resign. "The word sack is too heavy," he said. "Anyway I'll ask him to quit."

Till tomorrow evening, however, when President Wahid leaves for South Korea, the high-level interactions between the second and fourth largest nations after a prolonged gap will continue, hopefully

strengthening their ties and facilitating the fledgling Indonesian democracy in the process.

The visiting President held wide-ranging discussions with Prime Minister Vajpayee on bilateral, regional and international issues.

External Affairs Ministry officials said that he was "very receptive" to Prime Minister Vajpayee's reference to the scope for Indian exploration of Indonesian gas.

The two governments signed an MoU for cooperation in tourism, allowing them to initiate measures to increase tourist arrivals in both countries and encourage a wider distribution of visitors to their tourist destinations and attractions.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 FEB 2000

India keen to revive ties with Indonesia

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 8. Maritime neighbours India and Indonesia today took the first concrete steps to develop a durable economic and political partnership after the return of democracy in Jakarta.

Rolling out the red carpet for the visiting Indonesian President, Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, India today said it was keen to revitalise its economic and political relationship with Indonesia. India, according to the Foreign Office spokesman, saw Indonesia as a neighbour and a key partner within the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

During talks with the visiting leader, the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, expressed India's keenness to work together with Indonesia in the natural gas sector. Reciprocating Mr. Vajpayee's sentiments, Mr. Wahid said experts from the two sides should now meet to work out the details.

Indonesia, the fourth largest country in the world, has large reserves of gas and could become a player in fulfilling India's expanding energy needs.

The Indonesian delegation expressed interest in utilising India's experience in the field of science and technology. According to the Foreign Office spokesman, India has agreed to post an adviser on science and technol-

ogy to the Indonesian Government. Jakarta is also keen to learn from the Indian expertise in smallscale industry. Tourism is yet another area of common interest and this was evident when the two sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding in this field.

A working group has been established to promote tourism. Both sides agreed to exchange information on incentives for tour operators, besides holding conventions and exhibitions.

The economic thrust to the visit is also visible in the presence of around 70 businessmen accompanying Mr. Wahid. Trade between the two sides at the moment hovers around \$ 1 billion.

Wahid's visit may strengthen trade ties

By Dileep Padgaonkar
NEW DELHI: Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia's first democratically-elected President in 45 years, for a brief state visit accompanied by a large number of prominent businessmen, including more than half a dozen of Indian origin. Their presence is indicative of the importance that Mr Wahid attaches to strengthening economic and commercial co-operation with India. Though trade between the two countries registered a significant growth in the 1990s—from about \$280 million in 1991 to approximately \$1.4 billion in 1996—the potential to increase it manifold is yet to be tapped.

Apart from traditional items, swift progress is possible in such areas as food grains, fruits, meat, agro chemicals and machinery, especially in the agricultural sector,

according to Ambassador Venkatraman, who spoke to this writer in Jakarta last month.

Mr Venkatraman pointed out that the Indonesians, after turning to the West for several years, have begun to appreciate both the quality and the competitive cost of pumps, diesel engines, tractors and tea processing machinery made in India. Indian engineering companies could undertake projects, offer consultancy and provide equipment.

Other areas worth exploring, according to him, are drugs and pharmaceuticals. Indonesia already imports bulk drugs from India in large quantities.

Now finished formulations, whose quality meets with the highest international standards, can also find a ready market.

Up to 1985, India figured among the top five investors in Indonesia.

It lost out to other countries during Indonesia's economic boom.

But even then, several Indian companies exploited business opportunities in fields such as textiles, steel, transportation, hotels, engineering, construction and consultancy.

However, the scope of investments is vast, not least because the economic crisis of 1997-1998 led to the closure of thousands of small and medium-sized industries. The multi-national corporations also scaled down their operations. Sugar plantations in Java thus need to be urgently revamped. So does the mining sector.

A note prepared by the Indian Embassy in Jakarta states that Indonesian investors are also exploring business opportunities in India.

The Sinar Mas Group has invested \$250 million in a state-of-art

manufacturing plant in Pune. Another major group, Gudang Garam, will also be making a large investment soon.

The note adds that while Indonesian companies will be eager to look at Indian technology, including, in the first place information technology, which is suited to their country's needs and is competitively priced, Indian companies can significantly step up the import of Indonesian commodities: coal, palm oil, pulp and paper, cashews, spices, wood and so forth.

President Wahid has expressed keen interest in getting to know more about the way India has handled the macro-management of its economy.

India, in turn, can exploit this visit to add substance to its "Look East" policy which has enabled it to become a full dialogue partner of ASEAN.

Wahid's India visit may boost bilateral relations

Apratim Mukarji
New Delhi, February 7

HT-10
97

THE INDONESIAN President Abdurrahman Wahid's two-day visit beginning tomorrow can prove crucial not only for bilateral relations but also for the Asia-Pacific region.

Mr Wahid has become the first democratically elected President of the largest Muslim country in over three decades. He has already emerged as an exceptional Asian leader who is fighting a significant battle for democracy in a region where it has traditionally been at a discount.

India is watching keenly his struggle to place democracy on a firm footing in the face of growing opposition from the all-powerful Indonesian Army. His efforts to restore the shattered economy and ethnic amity and promote development involving all the communities are inviting no less sympathy in this country.

From India's point of view, President Wahid is her genuine friend, a qualification even President Sokarno lacked at times. The genuineness of his pro-Indian feelings was apparent long before President Suharto's downfall was even a distant possibility and the renowned Islamic scholar and

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staunch secularist was far away from the seat of power. The President's arrival here tomorrow morning will be followed by a series of discussions with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh and Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises Minister Dr Vallabh Bhai Ramjibhai. He will also have meetings with President K.R. Narayanan and Vice-President Krishan Kant. The two countries will be seeking to expand and promote cooperation.

He leaves New Delhi on February 9 after a call by leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi, a meeting with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and a farewell meeting with his Indian counterpart.

The Indian interest in President Wahid has risen visibly ever since the latter identified this country as one of those with which Indonesia would be seeking closer links, especially in economic development.

As in the case of various African and Asian countries, Indonesia is also looking for Indian expertise in developing its small and medium-scale industry and agriculture. It is in this endeavour, vital for Indonesia, that he seeks India's cooperation.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 8 FEB 2000

Islam should be separated from State, says Wahid

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 9

ISLAM SHOULD be separated from the state and developed as a personal morality, President of the largest Muslim country in the world, Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid said here today.

An internationally recognised Islamic scholar and a former Chairman of Nahdat-ul-Ulema (Religious Teachers' Organisation, the largest such body), President Wahid told a media conference here this evening, on the eve of his departure after a two-day visit to India, that there should be reciprocal respect for every religion in a country.

He said he found it wrong that Islamic law should be codified in a country into a state law.

Last evening, in his reply to President K R Narayanan's welcome address at the state banquet, he had said, "Islam should be developed as a morality, as a belief system, not as a state institution."

An ardent admirer and follower of Mahatma Gandhi out of self-convictions and a life-long study of the Indian leader's writings, he shot back today at a questioner, saying that Mahatma Gandhi was not a 'monopoly' of the Indian people. He mentioned his meeting here with a group of Gandhians.

In his banquet speech, he said, "as a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, I follow the late Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in seeing him as the leader for mankind."

Describing his visit as a success, he said that while the two countries had decided to set up an India-Indonesia Joint Council the memorandum of understanding for which would be signed shortly.

Following Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's proposal, he said, Indonesia had agreed to explore the



possibilities for exploration of natural gas by India in the region near Sabang island lying close to the Nocobar islands.

Repeating what he had said earlier today at his meeting with the Indian corporate sector, President Wahid spoke again at the media conference of his concept of an alliance among China, India and Indonesia, "assisted by Singapore and Japan", in order to establish and promote an understanding

about an Asian identity.

Urging Indians to invest in his country, he spoke about the prospects of Indian investments of around \$ 100-200 million, mainly in fishery, agriculture and animal husbandry.

He explained that his current tour of a large number of countries was essentially to invite foreign investors to go to Indonesia which was now recovering from the catastrophic currency and economic crises of the last two years.

External Affairs Ministry officials said that during the two-day discussions, possibilities of Indian exports of electric locomotives to Indonesia had emerged. India had also offered setting up a vocational training centre for construction activities in Indonesia.

Answering a question, President Wahid said that while Indonesia was implementing the recovery package handed over by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a quid pro quo for obtaining the life-sustaining loans, "it is not that we forget our people". He added that the IMF was also interested "to see the Indonesian people go forward."

Answering questions on his rebellious Minister and former Army chief Gen. Wiranto, he said that he had 'great' respect for him. "We have been friends for long," he added.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
10 FEB 2000

Wahid hopes for better ties with India

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 9. — Indicating general satisfaction with his interaction with the Indian leadership, Indonesian President Mr Abdurrahman Wahid today expressed confidence that the new brand of democracy in his country would take root and flourish.

Mr Wahid appeared to take the controversy surrounding Gen. Wiranto in his stride, when questioned on the matter at a press conference this evening. He would be requesting Gen. Wiranto to step down from the Cabinet, and would grant him pardon if he complied. If he did not quit, the President said, he had ways of dealing with the matter.

When asked if a pardon would not amount to ignoring the view taken by the UN and sections of the international community on human rights violations in East Timor, Mr Wahid said he would do what was best for his country. Indonesia had fully complied with the relevant UN resolutions, he declared. To fulfill every desire of the UN might dilute national sovereignty.

Indian participation in the international peace-keeping effort in East Timor would be welcome, he said. Describing his visit as successful and productive, he hoped the ties between the two countries would be restored to the extent they were in the Sukarno era.

Signs of a revived bilateral relationship was evident at the press conference.

THE STATESMAN

10 FEB 2000

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2000

FORGING TIES WITH JAKARTA ^{H19-12}

AT LAST, RELATIONS between India and Indonesia are back on track and clearly on the upswing. The visiting President, Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, has clearly spelt out his canvas for building pan-Asian ties and creating a new equation between New Delhi and Jakarta. Despite simmering problems at home and his own frail health, Mr. Wahid went ahead with his ambitious tour of Europe and India to drive home the message that he was still in command and as focussed on international relations as on the pressing domestic crises. India seized the occasion to roll out the red carpet for the Indonesian leader and bilateral talks at the highest level have reportedly struck the right chord. The President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, and the Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, have all had useful meetings with Mr. Wahid, who must have been reassured that his plans for cementing a partnership with India are being warmly reciprocated. His entourage consisted of some senior Ministers, officials and businessmen. Mr. Wahid shared his perceptions on bilateral cooperation with the FICCI and presided over the signing of two Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with two public undertakings here.

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The MMTC, which is now a trading house, has signed an MoU with the Indonesian Chamber on counter-trade. This kind of an agreement with some Southeast Asian countries has been hanging fire for a couple of years. Even during the 1997 East Asian meltdown, India offered a counter-trade arrangement for the affected economies. But there were no takers. It makes sense for a cash-strapped country, low on foreign exchange reserves, to enter into a barter or counter-trade agreement with others. The latter will ensure that only the trade deficit need be settled in hard currency. India-Indonesia trade already runs to \$ one billion and if there is a counter-trade agreement in place, it can rise substantially.

The two Central Banks can monitor the flows and settle accounts periodically. The other MoU to enable IRCON, the Railway Construction Corporation, to execute projects in Indonesia must be welcomed. Apart from developing railways in some of the Southeast Asian countries, India must ultimately work for a railway link with that region and on to the trans-Asian railway project. The Indonesian leader unveiled plans to work together in the area of oil and natural gas. This is something that must be studied in depth. As part of the energy security plan, India must source some of its oil and natural gas needs from the East. It has already wasted an opportunity in Vietnam and must finalise a clear action plan for Indonesia and the East.

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Mr. Wahid has been forthright and practical in his views, both on domestic and international issues. He must know the complexity of balancing ties with China and India on the one hand, and wanting to maintain the excellent rapport Jakarta enjoys with the U.S. Last month, the visiting Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, shared India's desire for creating an Asian Free Trade Area over the long term. And now, the Indonesian President has outlined his vision for an Asian league, with India, China and Indonesia at the core. It must be borne in mind that Mr. Wahid is head of the world's largest Muslim country and the fourth most populated nation. But time and again, he comes out loud and clear as a moderate, liberal Islamic scholar-turned-political leader. He wants Islam not as a 'state institution' but as a 'belief system' or morality. It is high time India realised the potential for building a strategic partnership with Indonesia, spanning the whole spectrum of economic, political and military cooperation. New Delhi can begin by helping Jakarta develop an information technology base and harness science and technology for agriculture and fisheries.

THE HINDU
11 FEB 2000

Cambodian PM Hun Sen calls on Narayanan

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 18

CAMBODIA TODAY said that it planned to reduce the strength of its Army and implement reforms in public administration.

Visiting Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen narrated to President K.R. Narayanan the process by which his war-ravaged country was ending its international isolation. He mentioned its membership of the Association of South East Asian Nations in this context. He also briefed the President about the economic reforms undertaken in Cambodia.

Hun Sen, who arrived in New Delhi yesterday, began his state visit this morning with a ceremonial reception at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan, followed by a call on President Narayanan, who hosted a luncheon.

Later this evening, Prime Minister Hun Sen held delegation-level talks with the Indian delegation led by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. This was followed by a dinner hosted by the Indian Premier.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 FEB 2000

Hun Sen visit aimed at ending Cambodia's isolation

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 18. After a gap of over two decades, India seeks to build bridges with South East Asia and Cambodia has begun a fresh round of political and economic engagement.

The visiting Prime Minister of Cambodia, Mr. Hun Sen, today declared that his visit to India should be seen as part of Cambodia's effort to break out of its isolation. He pointed out that Cambodia is already a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and was taking steps to integrate with the international community.

During a call on the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, Mr. Hun Sen pointed to the economic reforms which had been undertaken in Cambodia, adding that his Government had also decided to reduce the size of the army.

India, on its part, also lavished praise on the visiting dignitary. The President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, praised Mr. Hun Sen for his "political wisdom" and complemented him for achieving "systematic development" of the Cambodian economy.

Keen to provide an institutionalised framework to the reviving relationship, India and Cambodia have decided to establish a joint

commission. The umbrella organisation will give policy direction to most areas including trade, investment and culture.

Both sides have identified agriculture as a major thrust area. India is keen to get involved in the development of the Mekong basin. New Delhi visualises that its involvement in the area will spin-off benefits beyond Cambodia in the region. Already regional countries, including China, are engaged in a major effort to develop the area.

Given the importance of joint forays in agriculture, both sides in the presence of Mr. Hun Sen and the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Be-

hari Vajpayee signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on agriculture.

Both sides have also decided to encourage people-to-people contacts by signing a cultural exchange agreement and a MoU on tourism. Besides, India will extend a credit of \$ 10 millions to Cambodia.

The visit of Mr. Hun Sen is part of India's rediscovered emphasis on its "look east policy" of shortening up closer links with South-East Asia.

India recently received the President of Vietnam, Cambodia's neighbour, and the President of Singapore.

The chance to make amends

THE recent visit to India by Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid could have passed off as another high profile visit with the concomitant *faux pas* and misses — protocol officials forgetting all about the First Lady of Indonesia — except for one thing: the moderate Islamic scholar-turned political-leader's vision for an Asian League with India, China and Indonesia as the core.

Feelers that, more than ever before, South East Asia is looking to India in the hope of forging a strategic partnership on lines other than just political and economic have been coming — making India a full dialogue partner and enabling it to participate in the Asian Regional Forum. But the formal articulation by the head of the fourth most populous nation, which is an intrinsic part of India's "Look East" policy, needs to be taken seriously — primordially for two main reasons.

First, India is getting another chance after two lost opportunities of the past — the post World War II period and the mid-60s — to cement relationships with the countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations. After the war, with the recovery of Asean economies, India failed to take advantage of the tremendous potential of the region to absorb Indian skilled power, and human resources. By the time the realisation dawned, it was too late and the region was already overflowing with the Chinese, British and Americans.

The next missed opportunity was during and after the Vietnam imbroglio which witnessed an overt and overt war of attrition between India and the South East Asian countries. Relations were stiffly cordial, marked by the exchange of visits by leaders of India and these countries. The Asian concept of a zone of peace, friendship and neutrality generated no warmth from New Delhi. There were some legitimate reasons with Indonesia's Suharto turning pro-West within the folds of the Non-aligned movement. Between 1965 and 1967 the Asean initiative was born which wanted some tangible form of association with India to share the experiences of implementing development strategies.

However, India — having conditioned its South East Asian policy by the over-

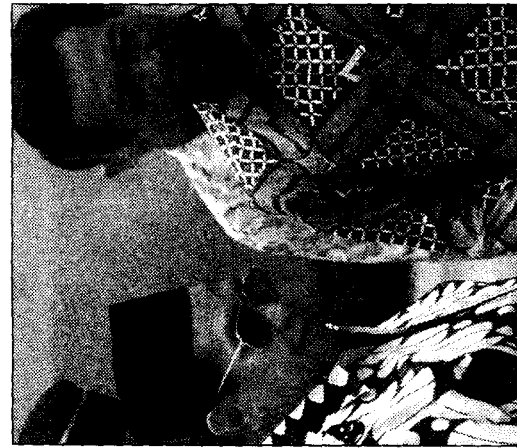
these ties also tightly stretched. Consequent to Singapore's initiative in hosting the first ever global Indian entrepreneurs' conference, a large number of high level visits have been exchanged but bilateral ties have remained in Singapore's favour at the ratio of 16:5. The total bilateral trade with Asean countries in 1997-98 declined to \$5.98 billion, from \$5.99 billion in 1996-97. This was attributed to the Asian crisis, but could partly be due to the shifting policy decisions of the Indian government regarding joint ventures and investments. In the 1970s too, out of the 36 odd joint venture projects with Malaysia, only two had been successful.

The Hanoi plan of action for 1999-2004 proposed at the Asean summit is a good opportunity for India to widen its interaction with the Asean through joint measures aimed at enhancing intra-regional economic integration and the establishment of an Asean free trade area by 2002.

A wider perspective of the "Look East" policy entails injecting some vigour in these sub-regional organisations, more so since India has a fundamental interest in regional security issues, sharing, as we do, maritime boundaries with several Asean countries and a land and maritime boundary with Myanmar. These sub-regional bodies of cooperation can provide the much needed formal linkage between south and south-east nations and deeper contact in the ARF framework to promote the development of peace and security in the region.

The unarticulated fears of Chinese hegemony have made the whole of the South Asian region a crucible of security dilemmas. The Sino-US rapprochement, common positions of both countries on the nuclear issue, non-deployment of nuclear weapons, the underlying soft corner for Pakistan, China's power and positioning, its muscle-flexing with regard to Taiwan, boundary disputes with India and Asean's opposition to China's claims over the South China Sea islands must find a responsive chord in India's foreign policy towards a strategic partnership in the Asean region.

(The author is on the staff of The Statesman, New Delhi.)



Abdurrahman Wahid: wise counsel

all view of the Cold War, the situation in Vietnam, and the Asean countries' virulently anti-North Viet-nam stance — extricated itself from any involvement with a grouping that it saw as part of the American gameplan. It took India 23 years to re-establish relations with the South East Asian nations and become a partial dialogue partner in 1993 and 1994.

The other reason why a reciprocal gesture from India on the proposed league is necessary is that the country seems to be falling into the same trap of investing too heavily in a relationship with the USA. The desire to take advantage of a pro-India tilt in Washington and the favourable climate in the West apart, the euphoria over Bill Clinton's visit conjures fears of another bout of excessive preoccupation with the West, which, in the past, led us to neglect relations with South East Asia and, consequently, three decades of low-keyed relations and

India needs to take
Indonesia's proposal
seriously, writes
NIVEDITA MUKHERJEE

unfulfilled joint ventures followed. Since the 1980s however, India's foreign policy factor on the demise of the Cold War has witnessed a deliberate steering of affairs towards forging close political, economic and political ties with Asean countries. In the post- Cold war era, the Asean finds itself close to India more so as a member of the regional groupings like the Non- Aligned Movement, the G-15 and the Indian Ocean Rim.

The conscious adoption of the "Look East policy" has seen India becoming a full dialogue partner and a member of the Asian Regional Forum which deliberates on the security and political concerns of the Asia Pacific region and the emergence of the concept of an Asean-Saarc growth triangle, manifested in the birth of sub-regional organisation like the Indian Ocean Rim and the Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation.

There have been a flurry of visits by leaders of South East Asian countries, beginning in 1996 with the visit of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Bin Mohammad in December 1996, followed by Philippine President Fidel Ramos and Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet in 1997.

Though India invests much of the discourse and content of its diplomacy with the Asean on economic cooperation issues, formal government-to government contact has kept the balance on

Looking eastward

By K. K. Katyal

Increased interaction with South-East Asia is to be seen not as an expediency but as an imperative for India to get the full benefit of the substantial economic and cultural give and take.

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28/2

NOT A matter of coincidence; the visits of four top dignitaries from South East Asia in the last 10 weeks were reflective of a conscious bid to impart due emphasis to the look-east policy, denied to it so far. If the new initiative is not allowed to peter out as, regrettably, was the case with the on-again off-again moves in the past, Indian diplomacy can count on handsome dividends, political and economic. The resultant balance is certain to be a source of strength, enabling New Delhi to withstand pressures from other parts.

The visitors were Mr. Trans Duc Luong, President of Vietnam; Mr. Goh Chok Tong, Prime Minister of Singapore; Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, President of Indonesia, and Mr. Samdech Hun Sen, Prime Minister of Cambodia. Then there are contacts with the ASEAN, of which India is a dialogue partner and, in that capacity, attends post-ministerial meetings as also the conclaves of the ASEAN Regional Forum, a consultative body aimed at promoting preventive diplomacy and confidence-building measures among the states in Asia-Pacific. Increased interaction with South-East Asia is to be seen not as an expediency but as an imperative for India to get the full benefit of the substantial economic and cultural give and take. The presence of nearly all major powers — the U.S., China, Russia and Japan — makes it doubly attractive.

New Delhi's preoccupation with its immediate neighbours is understandable — Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, apart from the Maldives and Bhutan, mean a lot because of close economic and cultural ties and a shared history and geography. Pakistan is important for a different reason — its adversarial relationship has impinged over the years on India in the areas of security, economics, trade and investment and people-to-people contacts. The foreign policy establishment, however, deems it necessary to come out with occasional disclaimers that its policies are Pakistan-centric. However, when it comes to attention paid to the West and the East, the lopsidedness is far too wide. The recent contacts, if followed up seriously, could reduce the imbalance.

In the early Eighties, the ASEAN was keen on India's participation but New Delhi cold-shouldered it for reasons of

cold-war politics. Later, especially, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India showed a keenness to join the grouping but the response was far from enthusiastic. It got the status of dialogue partner in 1996 through a step-by-step process. The financial crisis in the region again slowed down the interaction. The consequent lull is happily over.

The imperatives of closer ties with the region are only too obvious. As mentioned during the visits of the four dignitaries, India shares land and maritime borders with several countries and as such has a fundamental interest in the region's security and in promoting wider and deeper contacts with it for peace and development there. There is potential for enhancing economic cooperation and strengthening political ties with each of the four countries. Within this broad framework, the agendas differed. In the case of Singapore, which enjoys the highest visibility, the objective was to build upon the existing cooperation in various fields, notably information technology. Indonesia was particularly interested in enlisting India's support to the territorial integrity of the country — an archipelago which poses challenges to governance. In the case of Vietnam and Cambodia, aid was an important factor.

Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population, has chosen a secular path as is evident from its deep belief in the Panchsheel and its conscious efforts to keep religion separate from the state. The beliefs and philosophy of its leadership, as also India's support for Indonesia's struggle for liberation and the ties subsequently forged through the Nehru-Sukarno equation, provide a strong basis for close ties.

Aceh, northern tip of Indonesia, is just 100 km from the Andamans. Jakarta has offered to make it a terminal for natural gas — an exciting proposition which, if found feasible, could give a new dimension to economic ties.

Unfortunately, Mr. Wahid's visit and his interaction with the Indian leaders did not receive adequate media attention here. Take, for instance, his speech, in reply to the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan's address at the Rashtrapati Bhavan banquet. His model was Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, giant of the freedom struggle who opposed the Muslim League's philosophy and its exploitation of religion for political ends. This was what Mr. Wahid, himself an eminent Muslim scholar, said: "As a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, I follow the late Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in seeing him as the leader for mankind. In Maulana Azad's works, in translating (or interpreting) the Quran one can see how broadminded he was. In this respect, for me there is already one very good example besides Gandhiji himself and Jawaharlal Nehru. Because Maulana Azad, as a Muslim, has shown to me how his works should be the torch from which we will take inspiration." Equally significant were these words: "I disagree with those who would like to institutionalise Islam into the framework of formal one. Islam should be developed as a morality, as a belief system, not as a state institution." Because of this he found the example of India "very instructive".

As noted by Mr. Narayanan, the two countries today were in a position to cooperate with each other beyond the realm of culture and sentiment and put substantive economic, scientific, technological and commercial content into the framework of the age-old friendship.

Vietnam and Cambodia, devastated by protracted turmoil, face the gigantic task of reconstruction now that peace prevails and the environment in the neighbourhood is friendly. Vietnam is in a position to benefit from its warm ties with India, on the one hand, and China, on the other. The joint ventures with India in textiles, cement and sugar, and New Delhi's help in agriculture, especially in rice cultivation, have served to meet some of its

THE HINDU
28 FEB 2000

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widely-felt needs. The joint operations, involving the Oil and Natural Gas Commission, for prospecting oil and natural gas in Vietnam have reached a promising stage while the establishment of the Indian consulate in Ho Chin Minh City, now emerging as a major commercial centre, testifies to the expanded relationship. Mr. Trans Duc Luong talked of "new horizons of cooperation"; especially the enormous opportunities offered by Vietnam's *Doi-moi* process and India's reform policy. Vietnam's support to India's claim for a seat in an expanded U.N. Security Council and their shared world-view are another cementing factor. The visiting President's remark could not but have struck a responsive chord here: "The use of force and imposition of policy by a number of countries and regional organisations, unilateral military acts against independent and sovereign states in the Balkans and the Gulf (region) have set dangerous precedents in international relations, which seriously violated and threatened the basic principles of international law."

It was India's support in the early Eighties to the regime in Cambodia that led to New Delhi's alienation from the rest of South-East Asia. In the present-day changed context, that background was a major binding factor. India now responded positively to suggestions for aid — a credit of \$10 million for reconstruction work — apart from help in removing landmines.

As regards Singapore, the agenda is more specific. The two sides agreed to set up two task forces — one for cooperation in information technology and the other for a review of the entire gamut of economic relations — with deadlines for completing the jobs. Unfortunately, the hopes aroused during Mr. Goh's first visit in 1994 — he was the chief guest for the Republic Day — were not fulfilled and the India fever he sought to generate in Singapore did not catch on — partly because of the disappointment over the fate of a couple of mega projects. The lessons of the past have been taken into account while planning for the future.

All in all, the region has promise and it is for New Delhi to exploit it through sustained interest, which is an absolute must.

THE HINDU

Singapore PM to focus on South

By V. Jayanth

After a five year cool-off, the Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, is coming on a State visit to India in the third week of this month.

Apart from New Delhi, where he will have the customary meetings with the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee and some of the senior Ministers, the visiting Singapore leader and his business delegation will be focusing on three southern States — Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Mr. Goh Chok Tong, who has remained one of the strong advocates of closer engagement with India and increased trade, economic and political exchanges with New Delhi, last visited the country in 1995. He chose to come to India for two successive years, 1994 and 1995, when the India fever was running high in Southeast Asia and particularly in Singapore.

Because of the political uncertainties in New Delhi and the swift change of Governments, the two countries could not carry forward the dialogue beyond a point. The former Prime Minister, Mr. I. K. Gujral, visited Singapore to re-establish the links.

With the advent of the BJP Government and its nuclear tests, there was a cloud over India's engagement with the rest of the world and a dilution of its "Look East" policy.

Now that the BJP-led coalition is back with a more comfortable majority and its Foreign Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, has been able to establish a new equation with East Asia, Singapore has possibly decided it was time to cement a new partnership for the new millennium.

Even during the past five years, Singapore and its leadership have kept in touch with India and its economic agenda. A top delegation from the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has been making annual visits to both Singapore and Malaysia to maintain the links.

Industry sources say "The Singapore Government has built a corpus of funds for investment abroad and has been encouraging its entrepreneurs to embark on both a regionalisation and globalisation programme. The Prime Minister is expected to bring with him nearly 25 leading businessmen, in addition to top officials from the economic and trade agencies of the Government".

After completing the State visit and official talks in Delhi, Mr. Goh will turn to the business aspect of his visit. Along with the business delegation, he will spend a little over three days in Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai.

From the beginning of Singapore's engagement in 1994-95, Karnataka has been the major focal point. During this visit, the Prime Minister will formally

inaugurate the IT Park near Bangalore, which has been till now a flagship venture for the Singapore consortium.

In the intervening period, the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, has emerged as a star attraction for foreign investors. Keeping in mind the conflicting reports from Hyderabad, Mr. Goh and his team will make an on-the-spot assessment of the plans and facilities offered by Mr. Naidu before finalising any joint ventures there.

Industry sources argue "The growing competition among the three southern States will come to the fore during this visit as one State will vie with another to woo Singapore investors."

Even if Hyderabad appears to be most "business-friendly," there are negative reports about the State's finances and the lack of infrastructure outside the capital.

As far as Karnataka is concerned, the entry of Mr. S. M. Krishna as Chief Minister and his efforts to retain the State's edge in Information Technology seems to be attractive. If the new Chief Minister is able to convince Singapore that their pending and delayed proposals can be pushed through and new projects cleared without bottlenecks, the City State may continue to evince keen interest in Bangalore and its environs. A major drawback in Karnataka seems to be its infrastructure and the inability of the administration to stick to promises and deadlines.

'Natural affinity'

In the case of Tamil Nadu, the sources say "There is a natural affinity between Singapore and Chennai. But the State Government has failed to cash in on this sentiment. The traditional links, the existing contacts, the relatively better infrastructure and the congenial industrial relations environment make Tamil Nadu a very attractive destination."

They explain that the Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, had a useful visit to Singapore and Malaysia in early 1999, but there was no follow-up. If the State administration is able to present a practical and mutually beneficial list of projects, the visitors may be more than willing to invest in this State. Without being preoccupied with the next election, the State must try to keep the focus on development and industrialisation.

Infrastructure, Information Technology, tourism and hospitality services remain the major areas of interest and expertise for Singapore. Its experiences in creating an "intelligent city" and linking internet service through cable television may also be useful. It is now up to these States and their businessmen to keep a slate of proposals ready for the Singapore delegation so that at least a few of them can be discussed in some detail during this visit.

Indonesia for closer ties with India

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 5

INDONESIA'S PRESIDENT Abdurrahaman Wahid, who is scheduled to arrive on a visit shortly, is keen to develop close relations with India.

President Wahid has identified India, China and Japan as the three Asian countries with which Indonesia, still emerging out of the shadows of two years of intense economic and financial crisis, must build up strong strategic and economic relations in its bid to rebuild its battered economy.

For the first time since the early 1960s when President Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore proclaimed his faith in the greatness of India, President Wahid has revived the image of the enormous potentials of this country in South East Asia.

President Wahid, 59, was the Chairman of Nahdatul Ulema (Religious Teachers' Organisation).

A self-proclaimed admirer of Mahatma Gandhi, one of his first actions upon assuming presidency was to visit the Gandhi Ashram at Chandidasa in Bali, run

by another ardent devotee of the Indian leader, Madam Oka.

Apart from Mahatma Gandhi, President Wahid is also an admirer of Rabindranath Tagore and has an ambition to visit Shantiniketan. He is also a fan of Satyajit Ray's films and Pandit Ravi Shankar's music. While he recognises Japan's role as the economic superpower of Asia, in his plans to rebuild Indonesia, China and its diaspora (extending right up to Singapore) occupy an equally important role for the two most vital factors for economic revival—capital and entrepreneurship.

As far as India is concerned, President Abdurrahaman Wahid is looking for assistance in two specific areas—small and medium sectors and agriculture.

In President Abdurrahaman policy statement, he has mentioned that Indonesia can learn valuable lessons from India in intermediate technology. His approach is, however, not just economic but strategic as well. The roles that Japan and China have been playing, and will be asked increasingly to play, are related to capital, high technology and entrepreneurship.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
- 6 JAN 2000

'IT, BANKING SECTORS HOLD PROMISE'

Firm up look-east policy, Singapore PM tells India

By Atul Aneja

NEW DELHI, JAN. 18. Singapore today prompted India to reinforce its "look-east policy" even as the two countries sought to expand their economic linkages and discussed ways to galvanise a global campaign against international terrorism.

"I want India to look towards South-East Asia, ASEAN and Singapore. I know India places importance to relations with the continent of Europe," the Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, said soon after he was accorded a ceremonial welcome in the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan this morning.

Mr. Goh, who is on a six-day trip to India, also sought a larger participation of Indian experts in Information Technology in Singapore. "India is losing some people to the Silicon Valley and I hope you would lose some to Singapore," he said.

Mr. Goh acknowledged that economic interaction between the two countries had slowed down of late, but attributed it to the South-East Asian economic meltdown. "Our relations are very good but unfortunately because of the recent economic crisis in Asia, our contacts were slowed down and I am, therefore, here to strengthen our ties," he said. Not surprisingly, Mr. Goh is in India with a 20-member business delegation.

India had great potential, he said and praised the "second generation of economic reforms" initiated by the Vajpayee Government. In a meeting with the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, this morning, Mr. Goh suggested that India further open up the information technology and banking sectors. The President, on his part, said the Indian economy was looking towards a seven per cent growth rate in the coming years.

In the absence of the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, who is away in London, the Minister of State, Mr. Ajit Panja, called on the visiting dignitary. Mr. Panja sought collaboration



The Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, with the Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, during the ceremonial reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi, on Tuesday. — Photo: N. Srinivasan

oration with Singapore in the field of urban development.

Later in the evening, Mr. Goh held talks with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, who hosted a banquet for him. At the banquet, Mr. Vajpayee asked the Singapore Government to participate in a global effort to combat terrorism. Referring to the recent hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane, he said, "India is among the world's foremost targets of cross-border terrorism and has been so for a number of years."

Advocating a collective effort, Mr. Vajpayee said, "there are no international boundaries to terrorism. Small arms and other deadlier weapons are easily available in the arms market for a price. Most of these are funded by

(the) drugs trade which is an equally deadly scourge of the last century which will continue in the new millennium if no serious collective action is taken to combat it."

Sources here said that India and Singapore had established a special relationship in the early Nineties. Singapore played a key role in making India a full dialogue partner of the ASEAN as well as the member of the multilateral ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) which looks at ways to enhance regional security. Both sides also had an active defence equation and India regularly trained naval personnel from Singapore in anti-submarine warfare. Defence scientists of the two sides were also working together in a variety of areas including artillery systems.

India on right fiscal track: Goh

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 18



SINGAPORE
PRIME Minister Goh Choc Tong today said investors had recognised that the Indian Government was moving in the right direction.

Speaking at a dinner hosted in his honour by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Mr Goh said that Indian economy was on the rebound and "all the key macro-economic indices are healthy."

Handing over fulsome praise for

the Vajpayee Government's economic liberalisation drive, he said, "Your National Democratic Alliance Government has, in the short three months, successfully worked with the Opposition to pass key reform Bills. The market has applauded these moves and pushed up the Sensex to new heights."

Speaking at a luncheon meeting, President K R Narayanan called for collective international action to combat terrorism and drug-trafficking.

He said that there were no international boundaries to terrorism.

Pointing out that India was among the world's "foremost" targets of cross-border terrorism and

had been so for a number of years, he said that unless there were concerted counter-measures, the two scourges would continue well into the new millennium.

Earlier, President Narayanan and Prime Minister Goh, who was accorded a ceremonial reception this morning at Rashtrapati Bhavan, held discussions in a warm and friendly atmosphere.

President Narayanan said that India hoped to achieve a 7 per cent annual growth rate compared to today's 5-6 per cent.

President Narayanan described India's economic liberalisation policy as a prudent one which could avoid major dislocations in the economy.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 JAN 2000

Naidu lays red carpet for Singapore PM

HT Correspondent

Hyderabad, January 18

THE ANDHRA Pradesh Capital is being spruced up for the two-day visit of Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong beginning tomorrow (January 19). Mr Tong will be accompanied by a high-level delegation which comprises senior officials and top businessmen.

Arriving from New Delhi on the evening of January 19, the VIP visitor has a tight schedule during which he is likely to visit the Hi-tech city, which is the info-tech hub of Hyderabad and showpieces Andhra's achievements in the info-tech field.

He is also scheduled to visit the Ramoji Film City, the biggest venture of its kind in the country, on the city outskirts, besides viewing the giant monolithic Buddha statue in the middle of Husamsagar Lake from a helicopter.

A banquet is being hosted in his honour by State governor Dr C. Rangarajan on Wednesday night. His other engagements include a meeting with Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, his Cabinet colleagues and senior officials of the State.

The entire route all the way from the Rajiv Gandhi airport to Raj Bhavan to the Jubilee Hall has been given a facelift.

The road has been re-carpeted, kerbs have

been given a fresh coat of paint.

Flower plants are planted on lane dividers and all hoardings and kiosks on the roadsides have been pulled down.

Bunting and colourful flags decorate the entire route the dignitary will pass through.

On strict instructions from Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, officials are not leaving anything to chance to make the visit a memorable one for Mr Tong. Chief secretary Anand Rao and city police commissioner S.R. Sukumar personally inspected the arrangements on Monday. Strict instructions have been given to dairy farm owners to tie up buffaloes.

The instructions clearly specify that the

dairy farmers should not be allowed to roam around on roads during the VIP's visit.

Similarly, a close watch is being monitored by the Municipal Corporation staff on dumping of garbage on roadsides.

State Government sources said the visit of Mr Tong would help in furthering cooperation between the island nation and Andhra Pradesh. Singapore is already collaborating with the State in the info-tech field. Mr Naidu is a great admirer of Singapore and always talks of making Andhra Pradesh a prosperous place like Singapore.

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong will leave Hyderabad on Thursday evening en route to silicon city Bangalore.

India, Singapore to set up free trade zone

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 19. India and Singapore are likely to set up a joint task force to work out modalities for creating an Asian free trade zone.

The Finance Ministers are likely to head the task force. The two countries have also decided to set up another task force to identify areas of convergence and cooperation in the Information Technology sector.

The suggestion for a free trade zone came from the visiting Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, who conveyed it to the Union Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha. Mr. Sinha said there was a great merit in the concept and felt that the issue must be approached proactively by all Asian countries.

Appreciating the on-going economic reforms, Mr. Goh suggested that their pace be increased so that India was not submerged by the strong Western economies.

At a separate function, the Minister for Information Technology, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, told the business delegation accompanying Mr. Goh that the two countries had decided to form a task force to identify areas of convergence and cooperation in the IT sector.

THE HINDU

20 JAN 2000

Red carpet for Singapore PM

By R. J. Rajendra Prasad

HYDERABAD, JAN. 19. The State Government has rolled out the red carpet for the visiting Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, to send the message that Andhra Pradesh is a "happening State" with a friendly investment atmosphere.

Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, a long time Singapore Prime Minister, and his successor, Mr. Goh, are the two leaders of South Asia admired most by the Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, for the way they transformed a tiny City-State with a population of 28 lakhs, into a major economic power. If Hyderabad looks cleaner and neater compared to other metros in the country today, the credit should go to Singapore's experience which Mr. Naidu has tried to replicate here.

Even so, Mr. Naidu took personal interest in sprucing up the State capital. The road divider from Greenlands guest house to Rajiv Gandhi statue, a length of one kilometre, looks green with freshly laid grass and flowering

plants. The bad patch of road towards Raj Bhavan was relaid for the Prime Minister's visit. Such extraordinary care and personal interest was not taken by Mr. Naidu, during the visit of other dignitaries in the past.

Despite several problems confronting the Government, Mr. Naidu is meticulously pursuing his goal of ushering in an atmosphere of "good governance" in the State. In line with this thinking, the entire Cabinet and all Secretaries to the Government today attended a presentation by Prof. Bala V. Balachandran, of the J. L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management in the U.S., for about two hours on the theme of "information systems and decision sciences". This presentation was video graphed, and would be shown to other decision makers, such as Heads of Departments and District Collectors later. Next week, Mr. Prahlad, the "management guru" will make a similar presentation here.

This is a new experience for the Cabinet Ministers and Secretaries

here, and there was a mixed reaction among them, some wondering of what use would such academic exercises be to them. Some of the concepts explained today, such as improving the profitability of an organisation through increased incentives, or reducing the spending, applies mainly to commercial rather than Government institutions. But even so, the idea is that exposure to new ideas and concepts would improve the quality of governance.

After a three-day holiday in Dubai, Mr. Naidu will travel to Davos, Switzerland on January 27 for the Economic Summit. He has to contend with the criticism of the Opposition parties that his schemes were aimed at self-publicity, that his achievements since the general elections last October were "zero", a continuing strike by junior doctors demanding higher stipend, among others, but the Chief Minister says he is fully committed to making Hyderabad a "knowledge hub" and Andhra Pradesh a fully developed State.

THE HINDU

20 JAN 2000

13 Goh's warning on convertibility

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 19. The visiting Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, today cautioned developing countries such as India against haste in moving towards capital account convertibility, even while seeking greater liberalisation on foreign investment flows.

Speaking to a galaxy of corporate leaders, bureaucrats and diplomats at a function here today, Mr. Goh warned the developing economies against moving towards capital account convertibility without a well-developed banking and financial sector. "Unless (the) developing countries are fully prepared, they should not liberalise too quickly on the capital account as they could be overwhelmed by the sudden withdrawal of short-term funds invested in the stock markets. Countries without a strong Central Bank and well-developed system of financial supervisory systems should not open up quickly as funds can come in and leave very quickly, and economies can be ruined," he said.

At the same time, Mr. Goh pointed out that Singapore was strengthening its financial sector in the wake of the South Asian currency crisis and also to meet the onslaught of competition. It had plans of utilising Indian manpower in a big way, both in terms of skilled labour for construction activities and technical personnel in the Information Technology sector. Proposals had been made to train Indian workmen for construction projects in Singapore. Another proposal was to educate



The Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, with the CII members, Mr. Jamshyd N. Godrej (extreme left), Mr. Arun Bharat Ram, (second from left) and Mr. Rahul Bajaj (right), at a meeting in New Delhi, on Wednesday. Photo: Anu Pushkarna.

and train young Indians who could then return to this country. "But I hope you don't mind if some of them stay on in Singapore," he added in a lighter vein.

Responding to a query by the MTNL chairman, Mr. S. Rajagopalan, about Singapore's lack of interest in the Indian telecom sector, Mr. Goh said there might be a misguided notion that it was difficult to operate in this country. Though he was not aware of the

opening up of the telecom sector, he said he would surely advise investors in Singapore to come here. However, Mr. Goh also mentioned in this context, Singapore's fruitless efforts to set up an airline joint venture. India could have adopted an open skies policy, allowed investments to come in from abroad and then utilised funds saved for other development projects.

Earlier, delivering the key-note address on "Globalisation in the new millennium" at a meeting organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry, Mr. Goh warned that the backlash against globalisation had begun but no economy was strong enough to stop the tide. Neither was there a viable alternative. As such, governments would have to strengthen domestic institutions and equip citizens with skills to cope with the new environment.

Calling upon India's corporate sector to prepare for the changes following the recent economic reforms, he said the Indian economy would experience the same pattern of corporate mergers and internationalisation of business operations which had already occurred in the developed countries and which was going on in East

Asia. "I believe that when India liberalises its economy and plugs itself into the global network, it will fulfill its vast economic potential," he said.

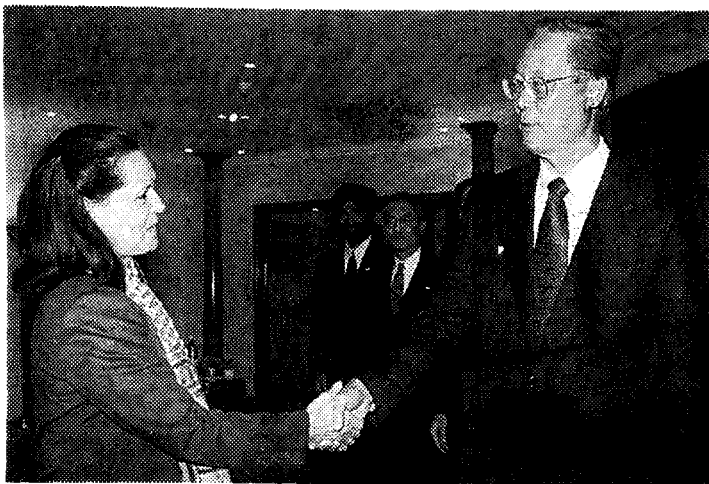
Referring to the failure of the Seattle WTO meeting, he said it could threaten the survival of the multilateral trading system.

Without an international order to regulate global trade, the world could fragment into exclusive and protectionist trading blocs.

It could evolve into a two-tiered system in which developed economies would be linked by trade and technologies while excluded developing economies would have to seek refuge in isolationist policies.

Conceding the substantial differences in the levels of development between India and Singapore, he said his country's experience had shown that it was possible to harness the forces of globalisation for the good of the people. Ultimately, isolation and protectionism could not be the answer.

The essential requirement was to build the capabilities for the people to derive the benefits of globalisation.



The Congress(I) president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, with Mr. Goh Chok Tong in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Singapore ideal 'launching pad'

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, JAN. 21. The Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, today urged more Indian companies to use Singapore as a platform to expand their business in East Asia. "One interesting area is e-business," Mr. Goh said.

Inaugurating the International Tech Park at Whitefield near Bangalore, Mr. Goh said e-business was experiencing explosive growth in Asia as evidenced by a large number of 'dot.com' companies. The Indian IT companies would find Singapore an excellent launching pad into the Asian e-business market.

Referring to the transformation of the Tech Park since he visited the site in 1994, Mr. Goh said with the coming of the IT era the strategic alliance between India and Singapore would bring great synergy.

The Tech Park was "an icon in Bangalore and it may be more apt to call it the Silicon Plateau of India and one of the top 10 IT destinations of the world", the Singapore Prime Minister said.

The Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, said the State Government would like to create an IT corridor of Bangalore, starting from Whitefield and following a well-delineated path to the Electronics City on the South-East of the City. Fibre optic communication lines would be laid shortly



The Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, who inaugurated the Singapore Technology Park at Whitefield near Bangalore, going round the area. He is accompanied by the Karnataka Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna (second from left), Mr. Ratan Tata (second from right) and the Karnataka Minister for Large Industries, Mr. R.V. Deshpande. Photo: T.L. Prabhakar

throughout the corridor along with a modern transport system, including an elevated railway, theme parks and uninterrupted power supply.

The State Government would start work within a fortnight on the Cyber Parks in Mangalore and Mysore and link them up with a similar facility in Hubli, which would result in a "Silicon Quadrangle", Mr. Krishna said. On e-governance, he said a subsidiary of the Singapore Computer Board

had been engaged to design an integrated Management Information System which would directly link all districts with the State headquarters. To promote decentralisation, Kannada-based computer systems were to be provided to the gram panchayats through a Wide Area Network.

The Chairman of Information Technology Park Ltd., Mr. Ratan Tata, said 21 new companies signed documents today to take up space in the park.

Goh for Asian free trade zone

By V. Jayanth

CHENNAI, JAN. 22. Asia must think of a "free trade area" to avoid being marginalised because of the goings on in other parts of the world, the Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, said today.

In an interview to *The Hindu* at the end of his six-day visit to India, Mr. Goh said, "It was your Finance Minister's idea and my argument was that the WTO free trade regime was preferable. Since another round of negotiations is not about to begin and since the West has its own free trade arrangements, Asia may be marginalised."

He said that the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) could expand to cover the Americas and that the European Community was expanding to include other countries. So an Asian Free Trade Area would be a good idea. "I think it is for the long term. I see no harm in getting some economists and academics to study this idea. If the benefits are obvious, then I think we must consider this seriously."

The Prime Minister said there was a "lapse of attention" in the interaction between India and the ASEAN. "We were preoccupied with the financial crisis and India was not too deeply affected by it. Now that the crisis is over, I think both sides must begin to nurture our cordial relations and turn it to

something much stronger." Mr. Goh, who visited India after a gap of five years, said that during his earlier visit, only the Prime Minister, Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao, and the Finance Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, were talking about reforms. But now, there was a wider consensus. One major change now was that the States and their Chief Ministers were pro-active and there was a healthy competition to attract foreign investments. "They must work for a pro-investment climate for foreign investors and we are certainly keen on tapping Indian potential."

If India pushed ahead with the second generation reforms and opened up its economy, besides increasing its trade with the ASEAN, the time would come to invite India to a summit of ASEAN leaders, Mr. Goh said.

Making it clear it was his view, the Prime Minister said, "I have to test this out on my colleagues in the ASEAN. We have this regular dialogue with the East Asian countries of Japan, South Korea and China because of the economic benefits. If India opens up and there is an increase in trade between India and the ASEAN, I think a dialogue is called for at our regular summits. At the right time, I think there is a place for India at the ASEAN-plus-Asian countries dialogue."

THE HINDU
23 JAN 2000

India must open up its economy, says Singapore PM

9 16 05:00

At the end of his six-day visit to India last week, the Prime Minister of Singapore,

Mr. Goh Chok Tong, shared his perceptions and impressions in a half-an-hour interview with V. Jayanthi in Chennai. His message was simple and straight — liberalise further and plug in to the global economy, let us work together for mutual benefit. Excerpts from the interview:

V. Jayanthi: After five years, you have returned to India. Do you see any significant change since 1995?

Mr. Goh Chok Tong: In a sense, nothing much has changed. When I came in 1994-95, India was talking about reforms and opening up to foreign investments. After five years, I heard the same message — that India is going to liberalise its economy cautiously and embark on second generation reforms. But in fact, I am more encouraged this time because there seems to be a greater consensus among political leaders that India must go forward. If they want to go on with the second generation reforms, it must be encouraged.

You have spoken about the inevitability of globalisation and the breakdown in the WTO. How do you view the West's insistence on linking non-trade issues with the WTO process?

I believe strongly that this is counter-productive. The importance of environment, child labour, human rights and even democracy is not only for the West but also for Asia. My question to an Asian critic, was do you really think Asians want to exploit their children as child labour or they do not believe in human rights. It is only because at this stage of Asia's

development, it has to take into account its own circumstances and the way to eradicate child labour and create a better environment is to have more trade. Only then you can lift the standard of emerging economies. Then, human rights and environment protection can all be included. These countries are grappling with basics — like producing food. So, I am not in favour of tying up these issues with the WTO. There is a place for discussions on environment and labour, in other organisations like the ILO.

Information technology, insurance and infrastructure are the basic strengths of Singapore. How do you see the environment in India in these sectors?

The States now have much more interest in pushing their own development. The Chief Minister has become the salesman for his State in terms of economic investments. That development is healthy. They must work out a pro-investment climate for foreign investments. There are some areas in which Singapore will be interested, like IT, we are very keen. Besides investing in India, we are keen on tapping into India to see how, together, we can sell the products in the world market. Development of some ports is something we have been asked to look at and we will get some of our people to look at some ports. I was told India is going to designate a few more international airports and Singapore has been asked whether we can invest, improve, upgrade or manage these airports.

You and your business delegation have focussed on three southern States. All the three are keen on a tie up and look at IT as the

thrust area. How do you consider the potential in the States?

Each State has its own attractions. My job is to facilitate the flow of investments from Singapore. I cannot choose the States in which they must invest. Our private sector has already invested in these three States. So they wanted me to look at their projects. Tamil Nadu seems to have the largest number of investment projects from Singapore. But the attractions are different. Karnataka seems more keen on IT, Hyderabad has a wider range — IT, tourism, ports and airports. It is for the private sector to sort out what it wants to do.

You have spoken frankly about the frustration over the delays in the Bangalore airport project. Does Karnataka remain your preferred investment destination?

We already have some big projects in Karnataka. I won't really say Karnataka is a preferred destination. I don't know where the private sector will find more opportunities. Having sunk in millions of dollars in Bangalore, I would certainly like to help that project succeed. It has become a symbol of cooperation between India and Singapore. That will be a good publicity for India and Singapore's capabilities. You cannot expect any big project for some time because of the complexity of doing business in India. You need a lot of patience to get licences and approvals. There are other obstacles in infrastructure. For instance, a good port will need good roads outside, telecommunication facilities etc. You need all facilities. So people prefer to come in with small projects, which I think is the right approach.

Wahid's visit will be precursor of stronger Delhi-Jakarta ties

By Dileep Padgaonkar

JAKARTA: After drifting apart for more than three decades, India and Indonesia, once close buddies in the non-aligned movement, are all set to come closer again to meet the challenges of the post-Cold War world. The forthcoming visit to New Delhi of Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia's first democratically elected President in five decades, will give the two countries the opportunity



Wahid

to strengthen their economic ties, deepen their political understanding, augment their educational and cultural exchanges and, by and by, seek areas of cooperation in the strategic field between the two close maritime neighbours.

In a wide-ranging interview to *The Times of India* at his official residence here earlier this week, President Wahid, popularly known as Gus Dur, said that expanding commercial relations was at the top of his agenda. He praised the strides that India had taken in science and technology and wanted Indian skills to be put to good use in Indonesia, a country endowed with

vast natural resources and which is committed to a transparent and accountable market economy.

The 59-year-old Wahid, who is frail of health and nearly blind, is coming to India at a time when his country confronts intractable problems. One province, East Timor, has broken loose. Communal and separatist strife threatens to overwhelm three other provinces. Relations between the civilian government and the military, which has ruled the roost for three decades, are testy. They could reach breaking point if the government allows prosecution of officers guilty of human rights abuses. The economy is struggling

to recover from the body blow it received in the East Asian crisis of 1997-1998. Clearly, Mr Wahid needs all the help he can get to keep Indonesia, now the world's third most populous democracy, in one piece.

At the very start of the interview, Mr Wahid stressed that as a longtime admirer of Mahatma Gandhi's teachings, he envisaged a new world order where there would be no place for violence and "hegemonism". He said that "no country, no matter how big or powerful, should force the people of another country to follow its views". He cited the example of Indonesia and Singapore. "Indonesia is powerful and I intend to make it

great. But it must always respect Singapore's sovereignty."

Mr Wahid said that Indonesia would seek closer ties with other Asian nations—including India and China—in its quest to build a truly multi-polar world. "Regional groupings like ASEAN, SAARC and others must try to develop a unique system. It will not be an alternative to the U.N.," he said, adding: "I respect the U.N. But the U.N. must respect other nations."

He said that the "real problem today was that only the powerful decide what is Western and, therefore, universal and what is not". The comment came in response to a specific

query about what he thought of Samuel Huntington's much debated theory of the "clash of civilisations". He disagreed with the American academic. "We must develop a unique civilisation for ourselves, not for others. Alongside, we must seek to establish a common civilisation appreciated by all. This would be impossible if there is hegemony," he said. "In India," he added, "you have millions of Hindus. You also have 110 million Muslims. If you have hegemony, you will fail to have a great Indian civilisation."

► Continued on page 24
► Indonesian President backs non-sectarian India, Page 24

Indonesian President backs non-sectarian India

By Dileep Padgaonkar
JAKARTA: President Abdurrahman Wahid was particularly forthright on the mushroom growth of religious extremism in many parts of the world. Asked to explain the reasons for this dangerous phenomenon, he told the *Times of India*: "It seems to me to be a response to modernisation."

"In the modernisation process," he said, "you tend to stress your identity. You tend to be 'true' Muslims and 'true' Hindus. In fact, you adhere to formalism. You want to be Muslim in a formal sense in order to stand apart from those who are not 'true' Muslims. And then you distinguish between 'true' Muslims and non-Muslims. Or between 'true' Hindus and non-Hindus."

Mr Wahid said he did not agree with this approach at all. "Each one of us has a unique identity. But each one of us also has a common identity. I, for example, share much with Hindus in India: goodness, righteousness, what is proper and what is not proper. Why not? I do not want one civilisation to be pit-

ted against another. I want all civilisations to share as much as they would want to."

Mr Wahid has often said that religion must serve a useful moral and educational purpose but that it should not interfere with the laws of the land, with governance or with politics in general. In this light, how does he respond to a nation-state rooted in a single religion?

"The idea of a nation-state is deeply anchored in the history of the nation," he said. "Here in Indonesia, we had Hindu kingdoms, Buddhist kingdoms, Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms. Then we had the Javanese. Many profess Islam but don't practice it. But all are attached to their local traditions, language and cultural inheritance. This, I am sure, is true of Hindus in India as well. I share the idea of a non-sectarian India."

Mr Wahid said that people take to formalism in religion in the mistaken belief that this will solve their problems. But that is an easy way out. "Many, many Muslims still do not understand their religion," he remarked. He recalled that he had once received a delegation

of ulemas from Pakistan. They wanted him to pray for their country because it had violated a cardinal principle of Islam: it had elected a woman, Benazir Bhutto, as prime minister.

He said he told them: "Maybe the rule was good in the 7th century A.D. when Arabian society personalised leadership. But now leadership is institutionalised. The leader has to work with a cabinet, follow regulations. So what does it matter who the ruler is?"

Asked what could be done at the regional and international levels to combat the menace of terrorism, Mr Wahid said: "There is no other way but to educate people to make them realise that they live for human beings at large. But practical steps must also be taken to contain the militants. A carrot-and-stick policy is required."

Mr Wahid was forthright when asked about India's emergence as a nuclear weapons state. He said: "As a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, I feel that no country should own nuclear weapons. But the fact is that the whole world now wants to possess nuclear ar-

ms. We have to live with the bomb. All this can only lead us to say: Please take precautions. Control the weapons carefully. Don't be controlled by them."

He went on to add: "It is ironical that India, which is still a developing country, acquired a bomb. So did Pakistan. It is better to spend money on development than on nuclear weapons."

But what about the nuclear-haves who wish to preserve their hegemony? Mr Wahid replied: "As a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, I believe that you should begin with yourself. Whatever the instigating factors, set the example now. The thought that India will be attacked by a nuclear power is crazy. And so it is with Pakistan. But both sides accuse each other. So the quarrel will never end."

However, that was not his last word on the subject. He added: "We must remember nevertheless that for India the China factor is also important. Atomic arms should be used as means of pressure, as a diplomatic weapon, not as a real one."

THE TIMES OF INDIA
29 JAN 2000

Wahid's interest in Indian culture an asset to ties

By Dileep Padgaonkar
(Continued from Page 1)

The words were uttered without a hint of reproach. And with good reasons too. As a widely respected Muslim scholar in the world's largest Muslim nation, Mr Wahid, through his 30-million-strong organisation known as the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), has preached and practised an Islam which is moderate, tolerant of other faiths and, what is singularly striking, at ease with Indonesia's Hindu and Buddhist cultural heritage.

Apart from his abiding reverence for Mahatma Gandhi, Mr Wahid is renowned for his passionate interest in Indian classical and popular music (Ustad Vilayat Khan performed at the Presidential Palace on Wednesday), his familiarity with the Ramayana and the Mahabharata

and his fondness for the writings of Rabindranath Tagore. Like his Vice President, Megawati Sukarnoputri, he holds India's democracy and its secular order in high esteem. By that same token, he holds hegemonism, religious extremism and terrorism with barely concealed contempt.

Hegemonism, he said, is just plain narrow-mindedness. "When orthodox Jews stone cars on the sabbath (Saturday), that is considered to be Western. But when Muslims, who are also faced with similar problems, do likewise, that is seen as non-Western. This is crazy." He gave another example. "The powerful West says that the one-wife norm is universal. But in ancient India, in South-East Asia, in the pre-Islamic world and even in Judaism, this was not the norm."

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