

## **SOUTH ASIA'S LOOK-EAST POLICY: HOW DOES SOUTHEAST ASIA FIGURE?**

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'Look East' has become a popular concept in the foreign policies of many countries. For a long time, it was the North-South divide or South-South cooperation which received attention in the international discourse. In the context of South Asia and its interaction with East and Southeast Asia, it is primarily the 'Look East' expression that bears relevance.

This 'Look East' approach has to be seen on the backdrop of the broad political situation and rapid economic developments in the Asia-Pacific. There is a growing impulse towards regional integration within Asia and indeed in the direction of pan-Asianism. The latter is actually not a new concept. In fact, it goes back to the Indianization of Southeast Asia from the early centuries of the Christian era. As George Coedes, the eminent French scholar wrote. Culturally speaking, Farther India today is characterized by more or less deep traces of the Indianization that occurred long ago. 'The expansion of Indian civilization is one of the outstanding developments in the history of the world.'<sup>1</sup> In recent times, at the Asian Relations Conference held in March 1947, Pandit Nehru had called upon all Asian countries, from West Asia to Southeast Asia to come together in a spirit of brotherhood. The 1955 Bandung Conference of the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa had emphasized the need for solidarity and cooperation. This sense of commonness of Asia has now revived. Fast economic growth and sustained political stability is beginning to give to the Asian people increased empowerment and greater confidence.

### **MAIN FACTORS**

As we begin to analyse the 'Look East' policy it would be instructive to see what were the main pull factors. Certainly, the steady and sustained economic growth, especially in infrastructure and consumer goods by countries of Southeast Asia was a point of major attraction to South Asia. There was also a (competitive) feeling among South Asian states that the countries of Southeast Asia in their immediate eastern neighbourhood were far behind them till only a few years ago. For India, the 'Look East' policy also brought a direct interface for its Northeast region with Myanmar, the only Southeast Asian country with a common land boundary. The same applies in Bangladesh's case as well. On the external side, the disintegration of the Soviet Union had created major structural problems for India and some of the South Asian countries. The Indian economy faced a severe balance of payments crisis. As a coincidence, the winds of globalization had started to blow strongly around the same time. Southeast Asia, on the other hand, had emerged from the Cold War relatively unscathed. On this geopolitical landscape, all countries were constrained to reassess their foreign policy premises. South Asian countries, notably India, was looking for a policy shift, albeit a gradual one, and the Southeast Asian example in the form of its political cohesion through the seventies and the eighties (though India had serious differences with the ASEAN position on a number of issues especially the Cambodian situation) and its efforts to bring the regional powers on one platform to discuss the seemingly intractable issues of peace and security in the Asia-Pacific was before India. That Southeast Asia figured so prominently in India's (and indeed that of several major powers')

calculations was its distinctiveness in building a regional organization as early as in 1967 and to sustain it through severe pressures and difficulties.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

This paper broadly touches upon the various facets of South Asia's 'Look East' policy including political, strategic, economic or cultural. If one were to specifically point out the aims and objectives of the 'Look East' approach, it can be said that these have continued to evolve. In India's case, to start with, it was to resume (and carry on ) a dialogue with Southeast Asian countries, both bilaterally and regionally at ASEAN level. It was not an exercise in inter-regional relations, say, between SAARC and ASEAN. It was essentially between individual states of South Asia and Southeast Asia. However, efforts towards the intensification of bilateral relationship with Southeast Asian states also provided a useful opportunity for India to interact with the latter on their regional platform, namely ASEAN, and through Dialogue Partnership and ARF mechanisms with the larger grouping of the Asia-Pacific. In all this, one of the principal objectives that can be cited was India's desire to play its rightful role in the Asia-Pacific region.

## **RESURGENCE OF ASIA AND REGIONALISM**

Today Asia is on the cusp of renaissance. Its geopolitical map also seems to be shifting. Non-traditional states like Australia, New Zealand and Russia have either joined or are interested in joining the mainstream Asian integration process. Asia is clearly seen to be more worthy of interest and attention. It is at the centre-stage of global geo-politics. The four broad regions of Asia, namely, West and Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia are all registering vibrant economic growth. It should be noted that Asia's record in developing regionalism had not been particularly successful despite the fact that the concept of pan-Asianism was mooted as early as in March 1947 (even before most Asian countries became independent from colonial rule). It was not that Asian regionalism has contributed so substantively to Asia's resurgence. It appears that reverse is the case. Within the sub-regions of Asia, today there are encouraging developments towards regional integration.

Southeast Asia had taken the lead in this regard. ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) established in 1967 has proven to be the most successful. Other regional organizations such as SAARC (South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation), GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council), newly set-up SCO have also made considerable progress even though bilateral differences among states of these sub-regions leave room for further dialogue and integration. Regional institutions like the Asian Development Bank have placed emphasis on Asian regionalism and integration while discussions on a future East Asian Community and ultimately an Asian Economic Community are gaining ground. Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh spoke of his vision of an Asian economic community at the India-ASEAN Business Summit in New Delhi in October 2004 when he said, "Asian economic community is an idea whose time is fast approaching. And we must be prepared for it collectively."

## **STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES**

In the discussion on 'Look East' policy, it needs to be examined what were the strategic imperatives, whether there was a long-term vision that was kept in view and if any clear blueprint was formulated in the fulfillment of this policy approach. Speaking about a vision, a leading Indian scholar and diplomat, Sardar K.M. Panikkar in his book, 'The Future of Southeast Asia: An Indian View' (1943) had called for India and Southeast Asia to work out a 'co-prosperity sphere' based on their interdependence and mentioned the need for a 'common defensive system'.<sup>2</sup> Implicit in his thoughts was a historical insight and a suggested guideline that geography has inextricably linked together the destinies of India and Southeast Asia and therefore they will be well advised to deal with issues of security, peace and development on the premise of 'cooperative security.' It can be seen that the present-day Indian policy broadly follows the same line. Former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had also identified India's security environment as 'ranging from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca across the Indian Ocean including Central Asia and Afghanistan in the Northwest, China in the Northeast and Southeast Asia and added that India's strategic thinking had also to extend to these horizons.'<sup>3</sup>

It can be said that broadly common security concerns and similar socio-economic and cultural aspirations of the peoples of the countries from South Asia to Southeast and East Asia have created a strategic continuum in the Asia-Pacific. Its compartmentalization in sub-regions was largely an artificial creation convenient during the Cold War, which countries in South, Southeast or East Asia accepted and have continued to observe. The strategic imperatives would include traditional and non-traditional security, maritime security, economic interdependence, energy security, human security etc. No doubt, in these disparate areas there would be differences and competition; however, they would only highlight the need for a dialogue and cooperative security among them.

## **ASEAN AND SAARC**

In analyzing South Asia's 'Look East' policy, it may be seen that countries in this region have primarily interacted with countries of Southeast and East Asia in bilateral terms depending on their political, economic or commercial interests. They have relied on their own historical or cultural association with East Asian region. Due to the existence of bilateral tensions among the countries of South Asia for much of the post-Independence period, their record in building regionalism in South Asia is limited, especially in comparison to Southeast Asia, though even in the latter, outstanding bilateral problems among major states have made any community building in Southeast Asia a difficult task. On the other hand, SAARC set up in 1985 has notably met at the summit level every year and SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area) has now become operational (only 3 years later than AFTA). ASEAN and SAARC have started a dialogue which takes place at Ministerial level in New York at the time of the U.N General Assembly every year. In the meantime, relations between the countries of South and Southeast Asia have progressed at bilateral level.

In view of the above, the importance of the regional organizations in South and Southeast Asia is to be seen in the context of the need for closer regional cohesion that countries of both regions increasingly feel these days. Unless they succeed in not allowing bilateral differences to

come in the way of regional cooperation, their own effectiveness in dealing with countries of their neighbouring region will be impeded.

In discussing South Asia's 'Look East' policy, it will be useful and necessary to analyze the approach and actions of individual member states as each of them has different objectives and priorities. Since India has been engaged with Southeast and East Asia for over a decade within the broad parameters of its 'Look East' policy, the latter has been discussed in greater detail.

## **INDIA'S LOOK EAST POLICY**

Since the early nineties, India had sought to engage both bilaterally as well as multilaterally the countries of the East, especially Southeast Asia. This was evident in the series of high level of visits to and from India; and in the dialogue partnership followed by summit level interaction between India and Southeast Asia. Among the various factors that could have contributed to this approach was the geo-political assessment that in the post Cold-war period, with the U.S being the preponderant power in East and Southeast Asia and China rising in its military and economic strength, India would need to reassess its own equations not only with the countries of the region, but also with the U.S, China and the dominant economic powerhouse, namely, Japan. While noting the strategic interests of these powers as well as that of ASEAN states, India has worked to evolve a policy of engagement with all of them.

Several elements of India's policy can be broadly identified which are seen to be influenced by or can have a bearing on the strategic, economic or socio-cultural parameters of the Asia-Pacific even as India's bilateral relations with China, Japan , Korea and Southeast Asian countries continue to expand.

### ***Main Elements***

(1) In pursuing this policy, India seems to be rediscovering its 'eastern identity'. India's approach can be seen to be in keeping with the emphasis and priority it had placed on its relations with the Asian countries immediately after independence. It may be recalled that India organized in New Delhi in 1949 a 18-Nations Conference on Indonesia following the Dutch aggression; India was Chairman of the Neutral Nations' Repatriation Commission after the Korean War in 1953 and was Chairman of the International Control Commission on Indochina in 1954. In the present time, through its intensive engagement with the region, India has sought to demonstrate that the present 'incarnation' of its 'Look East' policy is to stay. India-ASEAN Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) which includes a Free Trade Area Agreement, though reported to have run into rough weather following ASEAN's objections to the size of the negative list of goods proposed by India is back on the negotiations track and is expected to be concluded soon. In the meantime, the India-Singapore CECA and India-Thailand FTA are already operational.

India's stakes in Southeast Asia are clearly high. Following a continuous engagement between the two over the past decade, there is today far better understanding of each other than in the past. It can be argued that a convergence is steadily developing between India and Southeast Asia across a wide spectrum of traditional and non-traditional security areas such as maritime security, terrorism, trans-national crime, human, environmental or energy security. The Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity Agreement signed in Vientiane in 2004 testifies to it.

(2) India-U.S Engagement - The exchanges at the highest level that have taken place between the U.S and India in recent years and the strategic partnership that is evolving points to the beginning of a new chapter in their relations. The landmark nuclear energy cooperation agreement signed by the leaders of the two countries in July 2005 is now before the U.S Congress .A 10 year defence cooperation agreement was also signed between the two countries in 2005. India's expanding ties with the U.S can have positive implications in the Indian Ocean region as well as Southeast and East Asia where several countries have traditionally close defence relationship with the U.S. A question that is often raised is whether the 'U.S support to help India to become a major world power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' is with a view to creating a hedge against China. Both India and the U.S have made it clear that their growing ties are not directed against any other power. Given India's independent foreign policy ever since its independence and its rapidly developing bilateral relations with China any such apprehension would be out of place.

(3) India-China Relations - An important feature of India's foreign policy in recent years is the fast developing contacts with China. The two countries have not permitted some of their outstanding bilateral differences including on the border question to come in the way of a rapid expansion of political, economic or commercial exchanges. In a span of a just a decade the bilateral trade has gone up from U.S\$ 300 million to U.S\$15.9 billion. It is growing by approximately U.S \$2 billion every year and is expected to pass the target of U.S\$20 billion by 2010. During the visit of President Hu Jintao to India this month (November 2006) , a number of important agreements are scheduled to be signed . Improvement of India-China relations is a significant development for the Asia-Pacific region which should augur well for its stability and peace .It has been welcomed by the countries of the region. This also seems to fit well with China's own outlook to Southeast Asia in which it has through its 'New Security Concept' maintained conflict-free and rapidly growing economic relations with the countries of this region.

Given the large size of the population and economies, and traditional interests of China and India in Southeast Asia, an element of competition or occasional differences between the two in this region cannot be ruled out. However, Southeast Asia which for centuries had enabled both the Indian and Chinese cultures and business to co-exist and flourish peacefully in Southeast Asia (as denoted by the term Indochina within Southeast Asia) will have the capacity to provide cooperative space for both in the future.

(4) India-Japan: A New Thinking on the Horizon - Indo-Japan relations had remained marginal throughout the Cold War period despite the fact there was abundant goodwill and mutual respect. In recent years, especially after 2000 there has been a new interest in Japan to foster closer relations with India. The new Japanese leadership has reaffirmed it. A stronger relationship between Asia's two large economies would be a positive development for stability and economic progress in the Asia-Pacific region even as Japan's turbulent relationship with China and South Korea comes under review. In India's 'Look east' policy, an invigorated relationship with Japan will be an important constituent.

(5) Peace Process between India and Pakistan - Tension between India and Pakistan creates apprehension among the countries of Southeast Asia about enduring peace and stability in South Asia. It is for this reason that the peace process between India and Pakistan initiated by the two since last three years in which all outstanding issues including Jammu and Kashmir are being addressed through a dialogue is watched with attention and interest in the countries of Southeast and East Asia. The peace process can be an assurance to them that efforts are

underway (despite setbacks from time to time due to incidents in India caused by cross-border terrorism) to create a stable and peaceful environment in South Asia.

(6) Primacy of Economics - In India's 'Look East' approach, primacy has been accorded to economics. Expansion of trade, investment or technological cooperation are regarded as the key to developing closer relations with the countries of Southeast and East Asia. The dynamic economies of these countries have fully responded and the results are there to see. India-ASEAN trade is expected to rise from U.S\$13 billion in 2003 to U.S\$30 billion by 2007. China is likely to be India's largest trading partner in 10 years' time. Japan and India have entered into an Eight-fold Initiative for Strengthening Japan-India Global Partnership. Japan's investments in India are expected to see a quantum jump. The Korean economic presence in India through its conglomerates like Samsung, LG, Hyundai etc is now a house-hold name. The Korean steelmaker POSCO has announced the biggest investment in India of U.S\$12 billion in a steel plant and integrated facilities in the eastern state of Orissa.

India had admired East and Southeast Asia's economic miracle for several years. Economic reforms in India were to some extent spurred by East Asia's example. Today, India, the second fastest growing among major economies of the world and the fourth largest in Asia with a vast market offers an opportunity for Southeast and East Asia. India's emphasis on IT, its knowledge-based industries and the large pool of trained manpower can be useful assets for Southeast and East Asia as well. Economics should, therefore, be able to raise India's relations with the Asia-Pacific higher and higher.

(7) Issues of 'Soft Power' - Culture, civil society and the Indian diaspora are important components in India's Look East policy. As stated earlier, India's multi-faceted cultural links with the countries of Southeast and East Asia go back thousands of years. Today, they are part of the socio-cultural ethos of these countries. The rapidly evolving civil societies which are increasingly in touch with each other thanks to information technology can find much in common. The Indian communities in Southeast Asia have shown to be highly industrious and enterprising and have made useful contribution to the progress of their adopted countries. Besides, a growing community of Indian expatriate professionals is now making these countries their home. They will be very useful catalysts in promoting contacts between India and Southeast Asia.

If security can be termed as 'absence of fear', then there is far greater confidence and trust between the countries of East and Southeast Asia and India. CBMs on both sides at bilateral level such as joint military or naval exercises are on the increase and making steady progress. In the wake of the Tsunami disaster in December 2004, Indian ships were immediately sent to Sri Lanka, Maldives, Thailand and Indonesia.

India is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) since its entry in the Forum in 1996.

Maritime security is of vital importance to both, India and Southeast and East Asia. The location of India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands straddling the sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) and the strategic nature of the Malacca Straits mark their importance in the security calculus of the entire Asia-Pacific.

In the area of non-traditional security, terrorism is a common threat from which both India and Southeast Asia have suffered for a long time. In the post 9/11 period, this threat has become more serious. There are fears of linkages among terrorist organizations targeting India and

Southeast Asia. The two, therefore, attach high priority to cooperation in this area, both bilaterally as well as at ASEAN level.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF 'LOOK EAST' POLICY**

With regard to the implementation of 'Look East' policy, is there a clear roadmap that is seen to be followed in South Asia? There is often criticism in India that while it speaks of 'Look East', it actually 'acts West'. Look East policy should be about the mind-set, creating consciousness and confidence among the South Asian countries so that they can work out cooperative relationships based on mutual benefit with the countries of Southeast and East Asia. Since competitiveness is the key to success, it is necessary for the countries of South Asia to compete with East and Southeast Asia across a wide range of goods and services. In South Asia's 'Look East' policy it is imperative that the partnership is based on the value addition or complementarities that the countries of Southeast and East Asia look for.

## **EAST ASIA SUMMIT**

In India's engagement with East and Southeast Asia, the East Asia Summit (EAS) held in December 2005 in Kuala Lumpur was a turning point. It marked a return of India's active dialogue and participation in the politico-economic processes at work in the larger Asia-Pacific region. The EAS which is at present a meeting of leaders from 16 countries (ASEAN, China, Japan, Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand) will be held for the second time in Cebu, the Philippines in December, 2006. The EAS process is still evolving and it remains to be seen whether and when it will be institutionalized, whether it would adopt various mechanisms (as in ASEAN + 3 process) to deal with its agenda which is expected to grow wide-ranging and how member states would find 'comfort level' vis-à-vis each other in this grouping. According to the Kuala Lumpur Declaration of the EAS, five issues such as 'financial stability, energy security, economic integration, growth, and trade and investment expansion, narrowing down of the developmental gap and eradication of poverty, and good governance' were given special emphasis. Leaders representing 16 countries would decide which area should be focused for attention at the Summit at Cebu.

## **LOOK EAST POLICY AND OTHER SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES**

Besides India, other South Asian states like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka are also engaging Southeast Asian and East Asian countries. Their engagement as a part of a planned 'Look East' policy is, however, more recent. Each of them has evidently different interests and priorities which seem to depend on a multiplicity of factors such as geography (proximity to or common boundary with Southeast Asia), historical or cultural ties, level (also perceived potential) of trade and investment, diaspora, needs of maritime or energy security etc. All South Asian countries have generally admired the success of ASEAN, especially in comparison to SAARC, and have felt attracted to follow, in some way or the other, the steps taken by ASEAN countries towards building infrastructure, poverty alleviation, tourism and overall regionalism. At the same time, SAARC countries, also make a point out that SAARC has been in existence for a much shorter period.

### ***Pakistan***

Before 1971, Pakistan, with its eastern part having a common boundary with Myanmar (then Burma) was adjacent to Southeast Asia. In the fifties, it had also become a member of SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization), a U.S-led alliance in Southeast Asia. Since the separation of Bangladesh, Pakistan has no direct connectivity or proximity to Southeast Asia. Pakistan's trade or investment with ASEAN countries is small, but it is growing rapidly. In 2005, the trade volume was U.S\$ 2.6 b.

Pakistan, in its 'Vision East Asia' policy is engaged in building ties with ASEAN. In 2004 it signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with ASEAN besides a Joint Declaration on Combating Terrorism. It also became a member of ARF. It is a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN since 1997. ASEAN Secretary General during his visit to Islamabad in June 2006 had expressed the hope that ASEAN will be a full dialogue partner soon.<sup>4</sup>

Pakistan's bilateral relations with a number of Southeast Asian countries are good. With East Asian states like China, Japan and Korea, both North and South, they have been extensive. With China, Pakistan has had close ties in political and strategic including nuclear field. The U.S President and Japan's Foreign Minister had visited Pakistan in early part of 2006.

In the post 9/11 period, activities of Al-Qaeda connected terrorist groups operating from Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan (now a member state of SAARC) and their links with Southeast Asian terrorist groups is a matter of considerable concern to Southeast Asian countries.

### ***Bangladesh***

Bangladesh shares a small but common boundary with Myanmar, a Southeast Asian country. It is also pursuing the policy of developing close ties with Southeast Asia and East Asia. Bangladesh is a member of BIMSTEC, a sub-regional grouping for economic cooperation of a few countries from South and Southeast Asia. Bangladesh is also a member of Track II Kunming Initiative of four countries, namely, Myanmar, Bangladesh, China and India. In 2006, Bangladesh joined the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

Bangladesh's relations with a number of Southeast Asian and East Asian countries are growing. In Malaysia and Singapore, Bangladeshi workers are in a large number. With China, the bilateral relationship, especially in infrastructure projects is extensive.

As in respect of Pakistan, there is concern in Southeast Asian countries about the problem of Islamic radicalism and terror threat in Bangladesh.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Sri Lanka***

Sri Lanka has had a historical maritime and commercial contact with Southeast Asia. There is also a common tradition of Theravada Buddhism among them. In 1967, Sri Lanka was invited by ASEAN states to join the new grouping.

Sri Lanka's ties with Southeast and East Asia, especially in the economic field have not grown adequately largely due to the longstanding insurgency and violence in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is expected to be a member of ARF next year.

Exchanges particularly in the commercial and economic field between other South Asian countries, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Southeast and East Asia are small though there is much scope in the area of tourism.

## **HOW DOES SOUTHEAST ASIA FIGURE IN SOUTH ASIA'S 'LOOK EAST' POLICY?**

In pursuance of India's 'Look East' policy, it was Southeast Asia which has been all along in the focus of attention. When Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao articulated his view of 'including India in the reality of mesh of interwoven civilizations and the vision of the Asia-Pacific' in his 1994 Singapore Lecture, he had spoken of the immeasurable potential for India's partnership with the nucleus organization ASEAN. <sup>6</sup>The path towards engagement with the East went through Southeast Asia and that remains the guiding line even today. Southeast Asia and its regional organization, ASEAN provided a useful platform for not only India, but also other South Asian countries and indeed for many other dialogue partners of ASEAN to come together with the rapidly emerging and modernizing economies of Southeast Asia in an institutionalized manner and to expand their engagement. This was supplementary to their bilateral efforts which were largely unplanned and ad hoc. The opportunity for discussing security issues of the Asia-Pacific region at the only multilateral security forum, namely ARF, was equally useful. It enabled the member states to have exchanges in an open and frank manner thus contributing to a better 'comfort level' among them. ASEAN has thus proven to be a suitable bridge for many powers to develop relations with each other as well as with Northeastern Asian states. A question is often posed, even by ASEAN states themselves whether their role as a catalyst for dialogue among major powers has run its course? Is the value of Southeast Asia as an interlocutor in the 'Look East' policy for South Asia now exhausted? Such questions call for a brief review of the process of India's engagement with Southeast and East Asia in the past decade or so and its outcome.

In the Asia-Pacific, ASEAN states were quick to adjust to the post-Cold War realities and position themselves as facilitators in bringing together major powers for shaping a politico-economic and security order in the region. Be it the ASEAN Dialogue Partnership or Summit Partnership, ARF, APEC or ASEM, the role of ASEAN was pivotal. India and countries of South Asia could ride on this. Besides, Southeast Asia has its own strengths. A large and growing market of 500 million people, countries rich with natural resources and its strategic location. These assets continue to be valid. India and Southeast Asia can perceive a growing security convergence among them in a host of areas, traditional or non-traditional security, human, maritime or energy security. It does not appear to be the case with East Asian countries, at least not so far. And that is why Southeast Asia is intrinsic in India's 'Look East policy'. India and ASEAN signed and began negotiations on a FTA before India considered FTAs with China, Korea or Japan. Indian investment in Southeast Asia and vice versa go back to the 60s and 70s- long before investments to and fro between India and East Asia began to take shape. In fact, it can be stated that India's economic interaction and experience with Southeast Asia's highly competitive economies was leveraged to some extent by Indian business and industry in developing commercial and economic relationships with China, Japan and Korea.

The Indian diaspora in Malaysia ranks among the largest anywhere. In Myanmar, too, it is quite large. In Singapore it is one of the major ethnic communities. In Indonesia and Thailand, they are substantial in number and influential. This is not the case in the countries of East Asia. India's traditional maritime linkages are with Southeast Asia. It was the states of Southeast Asia which mainly supported India's entry in the East Asia Summit (EAS). Membership of this Forum also places on India a commitment and responsibility to provide regional public goods in

Southeast Asia. All this makes it imperative that India continues to accord core status to Southeast Asia in its engagement with the East even though in terms of trade or investment, China, Japan and Korea would overtake Southeast Asia soon.

Similar arguments may also apply in the case of other South Asian countries' interaction with Southeast Asia.

In the ARF, too, the role that ASEAN has played so far in creating a Forum of diverse powers is unique. By its very nature, progress on the issues of peace and stability through the activities of this Forum will be gradual. Southeast Asia's being in the 'driver's seat' in this endeavour has been helpful.

With the bilateral engagement between China and India showing a continuously upward sign amidst the indication that Japan-India and South Korea-India ties are also set to expand rapidly, the role of Southeast Asia in India's 'Look East' policy would assume a new and interesting dimension and require continuous analysis. The centrality of Southeast Asia in India's outreach to Asia has been brought out in the above. This can be reinforced further through India's long-term commitment to Southeast Asia so that India's policy approach to the Asia-Pacific region as a whole is placed on a firm footing for the future.

### **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> G. Coedes, The Indianized States of Southeast Asia,, East- West Center Press, Honolulu, 1964, page xvi

<sup>2</sup> Sardar K.M.Panikkar, The Future of Southeast Asia: An Indian View( London: George Allen and Unwin, 1943), page 16

<sup>3</sup> Atal Bihari Vajpayee, former Prime Minister's address to the Indian Armed Forces Combined Commanders' Conference, New Delhi 2002,

<sup>4</sup> 'ASEAN to welcome Pakistan as full dialogue partner' Islamic Republic News Agency(IRNA), Islamabad. news item, dated June 6, 2006

<sup>5</sup> Daljit Singh, The Straits Times article ' Dhaka wakes up to danger of Islamic militancy' dated April 7, 2005, and Anthony Paul in The Straits Times article ' Beware Bangladesh's festering terror threat' February 15, 2005

<sup>6</sup> P.V.Narasimha Rao, former Prime Minister of India, 'The Singapore Lecture' at ISEAS, Singapore, 1994