

**Special Remarks by Secretary (East) at the Round Table on India-Singapore Relations, Organized by RIS, New Delhi**

**RIS conference Hall, New Delhi; 6 March 2014**

I am extremely happy to be here and to share my views on India Singapore relations in the context of the broader link of India with South East Asia.

Singapore has played a friendly and proactive role in reviving our links with South East Asia over the last more than two decades. We all know that India and South East Asia have not been strangers to each other in history. The lands and waters between us, since times immemorial were criss-crossed by the flow of bullion, commodities, ideas and people. India's Look East Policy which was originally conceived as an external economic policy intended to leverage and revitalize these people to people links and peaceful exchanges. Since then, a strategic shift has taken place in our relations with South East Asia and the policy has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions.

The visionary idea of a long term cooperative partnership extending from Mekong to Ganga with its ramifications in all spheres of cooperation and constructive engagements by all countries of the region makes it the defining feature of this century, with monumental benefit and potential for all.

It is in this context that India has strengthened its institutional linkages with South East Asian region. ASEAN was the natural partner for our engagement and the institutional intensity of India's engagement with ASEAN is unmatched by any relationship we have with any other regional grouping. In just a period of over two decades, we have developed a robust tradition of annual summits, sectoral dialogues at ministerial level and nearly 25 dialogue mechanisms covering diverse specialized subjects.

The elevation of our partnership with ASEAN to strategic level in December 2012 saw significant progress in India ASEAN Plan of Action for 2010-15. Establishment of ASEAN India Centre in New Delhi has set the directional tone for the work to be undertaken. We hope our new Mission to the ASEAN would start functioning soon. ASEAN has led a movement towards greater economic integration in the region which has benefited its members and has drawn partners into a range of mutually beneficial opportunities. Given together, India and South East Asia constitute a community of 1.8 billion people, representing one-fourth of humanity, with a combined GDP of US\$ 3.8 trillion. We support the vision of an ASEAN community and hope that the trade between our economies would have crossed 100 billion dollars by the time ASEAN Community is created in 2015. The investment flows in both directions have seen meteoric growth, reaching 43 billion dollars over the past decade.

The ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement in Services and Investment will complement the existing agreement for Free Trade in Goods and build upon the momentum in future years. We are supportive of the Regional Comprehensive

Economic Partnership negotiations as a means to accelerate regional economic integration and strong, sustainable and balanced economic growth in the region.

ASEAN- India connectivity is a strategic priority and development of infrastructure - both soft and hard to ensure seamless flow of merchandise, services, people and information across the region is crucial. We will continue to contribute to the initiative for ASEAN integration and the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity. ACCC India meeting facilitates coordination and policy decisions on connectivity issues. Last year, Prime Minister has suggested working on ASEAN - India Transit Transport Agreement. Augmentation of maritime connectivity and its integration in multi-model approach would maximize the economic relevance of our connectivity initiatives. Trilateral Highway is on track and its extension to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam holds great promise. We need to think of innovative ways, such as drawing upon the expertise of private sector to invest in connectivity corridors such as India Mekong Economic Corridor. It would be useful to brainstorm ideas on economic collaboration to sustain the connectivity corridors.

Delhi Dialogue, a Track 1.5 venue has encouraged an integrative approach to the ASEAN and the wider EAS region.

There has been intensification of our consultations in regional fora with expansion of defence and counter terrorism cooperation. The relevance of ASEAN centrality to our regional fora such as EAS, ARF, ADMM+, AMF+ creates mutually beneficial synergy in our partnership. We need to find avenues within ARF, ADMM+ and AMF+ for better integration between India and the ASEAN Political Security Connectivity Blue Print.

We will continue to strengthen our engagement for maritime security, for ensuring freedom of navigation, for countering marine piracy, for coordinating responses to natural disasters and for peaceful settlement of maritime disputes in accordance with international law. Cooperation to meet non-state threats such as piracy, smuggling, transnational crimes, drug trafficking needs further intensification.

India is supporting Quick Impact Projects which are short duration, community oriented and capacity building processes to narrow the development gaps in CLMV countries. We support innovative mechanisms like ASEAN-India Fund, ASEAN - India Green Fund and ASEAN India S&T Fund. Efforts like ASEAN India Business Fair and Conclave and reactivation of ASEAN India Business Council have enhanced trade linkages and economic cooperation.

In this digital age, we also need to think of virtual networks as a way forward for connecting the region. Enhancement of tourism cooperation should encourage tourist flows. We also need to harness the cultural wealth of our region to enrich and advance our thought and action.

Singapore was one of the first to respond proactively to India's Look East Policy and strengthening of our links with the South East Asia region. The synergy between our bilateral initiatives and those on the multilateral fora is complementary.

The uniqueness of India - Singapore relations is that it strives to be ahead of the curve and continuously add value and content in multifaceted ways. India appreciates the strategic convergence and economic link that Singapore provides and would continue to a willing participant in the region as it evolves.

Over the last decade, healthy momentum of high level exchanges has consolidated the profile of a strong and stable strategic relationship.

Economically, the two countries are more engaged with each other than at any time in our past independence histories. The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) signed in June 2005, was first such agreement with any country and provided the template for our engagement with the South East Asian region and led to a transformation of the economic landscape. Singapore is India's 6th largest world trading partner, the largest in the ASEAN and the second largest source of FDI inflows. India is Singapore's 10th largest trading partner. The presence of Indian companies in Singapore has multiplied manifold; they use their location and Singapore's financial clout to leverage their position in other ASEAN countries. Likewise, large Singaporean presence in India has played a significant role in our economic engagement. The 2nd CECA Review will further promote trade and investment. I hope that there is understanding and flexibility on the views raised by us, such that the review provides tangible benefits to both the sides.

We could expand cooperation in cutting edge technologies, financial services, capacity building, logistics and management consultancies.

Great investment opportunities exist in DMIC, CBIC, Buddhist circuit and North East. Singapore could develop a "virtual city" or 'little Singapore' along the corridor including creation of heritage, education and recreational hubs. It would be useful to focus Singapore corporate attention on the huge opportunities of FDI in the infrastructure sector in India. India's infrastructure sector has planned for investments of about US \$ one trillion over the next five years in areas such as highways, ports and power generation. National Manufacturing policy and opening up of retail, aviation, insurance and other sectors provide great potential for Singapore Companies.

Sharing of Singapore's expertise in development of integrated townships and cities would provide useful insights for our own urban development challenges. Singapore's successful solid, waste and water management strategies offer valuable learning experiences for India.

Besides infrastructure, another area of potential and complementarity is skill development. The Green Field World Class Skill Centre in Delhi can be a precursor for institutions of this nature in other states of India, particularly the North Eastern states. It is however, important to see the establishment of the world class skill training centre with expedition.

As we look towards future consolidation, an expanded outreach to the states particularly the North East will open new horizons. India's Look East Policy also provides an interface between North East India and ASEAN. A focus on the North East by development and strengthening of connectivity with the ASEAN region

through trade, skill development, tourism, academic exchange, cultural contacts and people to people linkages will help to leverage the complementarity and promote integration for all of India with the wider region beyond.

Direct air connectivity to Guwahati would open up tourist flows to this microcosm of India and encourage trade, investment and infrastructure in these resource rich states of India. Aviation is a major priority and we need to balance our interests. While moving towards an Open Skies agreement is important, we would wish to first utilize the existing capacities under the ASEAN framework, especially in the North East.

In tandem with our impressive economic partnership, we share an incredibly diverse and rich relationship with Singapore. Our relations with Singapore have diversified to include a robust architecture of defence cooperation, fora for exchange of views on combating terrorism and trans-national crime, cultural and academic contacts or sharing of best practices on civil service reforms and training.

Both countries have a mutually beneficial dialogue at different levels in the areas of defence, security and scientific issues. Our continued participation in Shangrila Dialogue and fora like the ADMM-Plus, ARF and EAS has been effective in promoting dialogue and consensus among countries in the region.

Besides broad based and robust defence interactions, the Bilateral Agreements on Army and Air Force training in India have strengthened bilateral defence ties between the two countries. Combined service exercises could add further momentum to our defence engagement in the future.

India has developed considerable indigenous capabilities in Defence R & D and production and Singapore's R&D establishments are closely linked to industry. Enhancement of defence relationship between the two countries is in our mutual interest and would contribute to regional peace and stability.

India has continued interest in ensuring stability and security of the South East Asian region. The threats of terrorism, piracy and issues of maritime security require a high level of coordination and cooperation among all countries to keep the sea lanes of communication safe and secure.

India would like to exchange information on strategies for de-radicalisation, learn from Singaporean experience of involvement of private sector and academia in ensuring cyber security and Singapore's system of profiling containers/sea cargo and air passengers. Discussions on maritime domain awareness and additions of Extradition Treaty, Agreements on Transfer of Sentenced Persons and Cyber Security to our bilateral legal and security institutional framework would be valuable. Singapore could gain from India's border control expertise and domestic enforcement mechanism.

Promotion of educational, judicial, parliamentary and other functional exchanges is another avenue which could be explored. Technology has emerged as new frontiers with both challenges and opportunities that need to be channeled to meet human

aspirations. We would need to work more intensely on integration issues to realize greater efficiencies as well as address the needs of our people.

Regional cooperation will emerge as a vital pivot of generating new initiatives for a future oriented approach. The trilateral model of third country training programmes is a successful initiative to bridge development gaps. We would wish to intensify our cooperation by expanding the geographical coverage and diversifying into large number of innovative capacity building programmes.

Singapore has played a key role in the revival of Nalanda University, which is a symbol of our historical linkages and an abiding example of extraordinary Asian cooperation. It provides a beacon not only for bilateral ties but also in fostering closer regional relations.

Development of cultural contacts can emerge as a new pillar in our relations to strengthen our robust relationship. The presence of a very large Indian diaspora further enhances the relevance of our partnership and has cemented the ties of friendship between the two countries.

Indian Nationals have contributed immensely to Singapore's growth and development. The isolated incident in Little India was unfortunate and not premeditated. A large number of Indian Nationals were charged at different levels for their involvement. There has been discussion on the incident in India even in the Parliament and developments are being closely watched. While we appreciate Singapore's system of due process of law and full access to justice, we also welcome measures to safeguard the interests and welfare of the Indian Nationals who are hard working, law abiding, decent and peace loving.

We understand there are sensitivities involved on both sides and this is a delicate matter. However, it is a matter of concern and anxiety in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu that charged Indian Nationals may be sentenced to caning, which is perceived as excessive, cruel and unusual punishment. We strongly recommend that the charged Indian Nationals are not subjected to this torture. Our second concern is payment of compensation to the family of the deceased in a timely and fair manner. There is an expectation of compensation as a life has been lost and we hope our concern is addressed.

I am sure Singapore will take into account our close bilateral relations, the contribution of Indian Migrant workers to Singapore's growth and development and take necessary steps to maintain the vitality of this important partnership.

Singapore side, like us is keen to deepen engagement. The forthcoming 50th Anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations with an extensive agenda of year long events would take forward and strengthen our bilateral initiatives and build upon our strategic partnership to give it a future looking prospective. It is necessary that we continue to maintain a relation with Singapore that focuses on cultivating new votaries and in the areas that Singapore has comparative advantage in. We greatly value and benefit from Singapore leadership's insightful and informed perspectives on the big issues facing the world today including changing power equations in the region and hope that Singapore, a thought leader will continue to lead the way forward for Indian engagement with South East Asia. Our interaction

with Singapore has provided us the opportunity for interaction with a technologically advanced and efficient system in Asia and also a launching pad for our enhanced engagement in the ASEAN hinterland.

Our partnership with ASEAN is not merely a reaffirmation of ties with neighboring countries or an instrument of economic development, but an integral part of our vision of a stable, secure and prosperous Asia and its surrounding India Ocean and Pacific regions. Our shared values, convergent world views and similarities in approaches to the region should help us further strengthen the India – ASEAN strategic partnership for the next decade and beyond. We consider our partnership with South East Asia as a force of global stability and prosperity and in sync with the ongoing tectonic shifts in global economic and power equations.

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