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Speech by Dr. S. Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary to mark 25 years of India-Singapore Partnership at Shangri La Hotel, Singapore (July 11, 2017)

July 11, 2017

S.T. Lee Distinguished Lecture of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore on "India, ASEAN and Changing Geopolitics"

Speech by Dr. S. Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary to mark 25 years of India-Singapore Partnership At Shangri La Hotel, Singapore on 11 July, 2017

Professor Kishore Mahbubani, Distinguished Guests,

1. In his sequel to *The Three Musketeers* called *Twenty Years After*, Alexandre Dumas shared some perceptive insights on the nature of human relationships as they unfold over time. Even close friends and comrades discover that they do not actually know one another as well as they thought they did. Unanticipated agendas emerge and personality traits kept in check find expression. Through this narrative, the quest for advancement of course remains a constant. Perhaps, all of this could be said equally for the geo-politics of the day, especially in South East Asia and the Asia Pacific. This is a year of anniversaries and, therefore, one appropriate for stock-taking.
2. Dumas suggested that the same players in changed situations create differing narratives and outcomes. Given the dramatic changes in its surrounding landscape, it is in many ways the predicament that ASEAN faces today. At its inception in 1967, the United States was still very dominant even while repositioning itself in the context of the Vietnam war. Russia – then the USSR – was a formidable counter-presence in this region. China and India were internally very preoccupied, though not without either influence or ambition. Japan was economically ascendant but tightly coordinated with the United States. The UK, prior to its "East of Suez" policy was a significant security player as well. Much water has flowed through the Malacca Straits since then.
3. To begin with, this entire hierarchy of power has itself undergone a radical change. The United States is in the process of redefining its strategic posture, and not just in South East Asia. China's dramatic rise has repercussions that are still being evaluated, perhaps even by China itself. Russia and the UK have re-prioritized their security interests. Japan, having gone through cyclical change both economic and political, seems to be displaying renewed interest and energy. ASEAN itself expanded to encapsulate the very countries that were initially perceived as challenges that justified its creation. And as for India, as you will hear from me, the scope and the intensity of our engagement have changed immeasurably.

4. In one sense, none of this should come as a surprise, least of all to the inhabitants of this region. Life is about change and they have constantly adjusted to the larger global environment, even as they forged ahead with their regional integration and national progress. Through its very creation, ASEAN had put behind it many of the post-decolonization debates of this region. It navigated the Cold War very adeptly to usher in an era of high economic growth that served as a model to others. Weathering the impact of the Asian financial crisis in 1997, it then went on to actually expand its footprint through the East Asia Summit process. All its members benefited from the more open global economic architecture and largely came through the 2008 crisis as well. Today, however, they confront multiple stress tests that include new power equilibriums, greater political unpredictability, issues of rules and norms, uncertain geo-economic directions, the question of internal cohesion and perhaps even of the centrality of ASEAN to Asia's future. What I seek to focus on in my remarks is the relevance of India to the successful navigation of these challenges.
5. Now, August 2017 marks the Golden Jubilee of the Bangkok Declaration which gave birth to ASEAN. No doubt, it is an occasion for self-reflection for its members. But earlier this year, in January, we also marked the Silver Jubilee of the ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership. This process started at the 1992 Singapore Summit and it is only appropriate that we assess the partnership 25 years later at the same venue. This initial step was followed by India becoming a full Dialogue Partner in 1996, a Summit Partner in 2002 and a Strategic Partner in 2012. It is being celebrated through a special Commemorative Summit and a Foreign Ministers' Meeting in India as well as a broad range of governmental, business, diaspora, cultural and civil society interactions in India as also in ASEAN nations.
6. Historically and culturally, the links between India and South East Asia have been deep and profound. Expressions of our shared heritage and culture are found across this region. Indeed, some of the best surviving examples of Indian civilization over the ages are here, rather than in India itself. Even in more modern times, our destinies have been linked by global political currents. Singapore itself is the most telling example of how the future of contemporary India was shaped during the World War II. In the years thereafter, as we all achieved independence, our leaders cooperated and competed as they set about fashioning their national prospects. Overall, it was done with considerable camaraderie and comfort.
7. What really changed in 1992 was that a relationship which was largely harmonious but only moderately energetic was now suddenly charged by a new economic imperative. This was, thereafter, sustained by a series of policy initiatives, including India's first-ever Comprehensive Economic Cooperative Agreement (with Singapore), bilateral FTAs, as well as the India-ASEAN FTA that came into force in July 2015. As a result, ASEAN is today India's fourth largest trading partner and accounts for more than a tenth of its total trade. In turn, India is ASEAN's seventh largest trading partner. Investment flows between ASEAN and India have been steadily growing. Singapore, of course, is the principal hub of both inward and outward investments. Businesses from this region occupy a prominent position in the Indian economy across a broad range of activities, spanning telecommunications and aviation to logistics, road building, industrial parks, and finance. On their part, Indian companies have a presence in energy, commodities, infrastructure and banking. The expansion of connectivity between India and South East Asia is both a driver and an outcome of these collaborations. Indeed, over the last twenty five years, the inter-penetration and travel between ASEAN and India has been so extensive that most Indians now intuitively think of this region as part of their neighbourhood.
8. This relationship today has gone well beyond its economic and even cultural dimensions. There are thirty dialogue mechanisms between India and ASEAN, including an annual summit and seven ministerial dialogues. From the Indian perspective, ASEAN occupies a central place in the security architecture of the

Asia-Pacific region. It is our view that precisely because ASEAN represents the cultural, commercial and physical cross-roads of the region, it has a unique ability to reflect and harmonize larger interests of the world beyond it. We have seen this already in the workings of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) of which we became members in 1996. There was even greater appreciation of the criticality of ASEAN to the larger continental stability when it conceptualized and implemented the East Asia Summit process. India was privileged to be one of its original members and this gathering is a key event in our annual diplomatic calendar. We found considerable value in the ADMM Plus gathering of Defence Ministers as well. The more structured processes have been buttressed by the informal and adhoc ones as well. Among the arrangements that India works with today are the ReCAAP agreement on combating piracy in Asia and, as a funnel state, the cooperation mechanism in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore under the aegis of the IMO. The regional engagement is strengthened by a broad range of bilateral defence and security relationships with all members of ASEAN and indeed, of the EAS as well.

9. Noteworthy as this unfolding story of cooperation is, its real importance actually lies in the deeper significance that the post-1992 era has had for the reform of the Indian economy. Last year, we had a bumper crop of books on the 1991 crisis, some of them centring around Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. It was a natural occasion in India to debate the significance of those events. Tuning in from a foreign policy perspective, what came out was the critical role that ASEAN and Singapore especially played in shaping the thought processes of Indian decision makers. This was a forum for India to engage the world more expansively, test ideas, exchange views and seek feedback. Mentors of this region found a more ready audience in a changing India. Their advice and experiences offered guidance as India moved along an uncharted path. It was, therefore, only fitting that Prime Minister Modi acknowledged this debt through his presence at the funeral of Lee Kuan Yew.
10. Today, the changes underway in India are deeper and broader. A very determined effort is being made to expand manufacturing, transform infrastructure and enhance the quality of human resources. The formalization of the economy is also being accelerated, as indeed is the removal of impediments to its efficiency. It is highlighted by a commitment to make it easier to do business. Much of this transformation goes beyond narrow economic policies and involves social changes of differing magnitudes. Consequently, we have also seen awareness campaigns and motivational efforts to broaden public support. Some of it at least would be familiar to this part of the world.
11. Burgeoning ties with ASEAN was initially described in India as our "Look East" policy. To underline our seriousness in taking it forward, especially through physical connectivity projects, this was upgraded to "Act East" a few years ago. But whatever its status, this relationship actually reflects a profound shift in India's geo-political outlook towards the world to its East. Growing contacts and expanding cooperation with South East Asia opened up to India the world beyond it. This was around the time when India also sought to engage Japan, South Korea and China more seriously. There is no question that ASEAN was a bridge – psychologically, politically and perhaps even physically. In the years thereafter, as we entered the East Asia Summit process, this particular direction of India's engagement strengthened even further and extends now to Australia and New Zealand as well as the Pacific Islands. Indeed, without ASEAN, the transformation of the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific would have never happened.
12. Developments over the last quarter century have brought out that the India-ASEAN engagement has actually unleashed ideas, interests and forces that none of us could have foreseen at that time. Let me share a few examples:
 - (i) At its most basic level, the relationship with ASEAN has contributed to changing the India mindset, perhaps even more of the society than of policy makers. Exposures and interactions have through osmosis

raised new expectations and ambitions. Some of these are today very apparent in our policy activities and debates.

(ii) Quite apart from encouraging economic reforms, it has facilitated the externalisation of the Indian economy to a great degree. Indeed, the new wave of Indian investment abroad began in South East Asia. Singapore, of course, is a vivid example.

(iii) Involvement with the ASEAN and the consequent development of trade and sourcing of resources from the East has significantly heightened maritime consciousness in India. This has led us not only to be more active in pursuit of maritime interests but to use the domain to add an additional layer to our policy engagement. In fact, it would be no exaggeration to assert that if there is now a focussed and integrated Indian Ocean policy in my country today, this was largely shaped by the dynamics of our ASEAN policy. Another corollary of "Act East" could well be the revival of our long-neglected Eastern Seaboard.

(iv) Interaction with ASEAN has also had a beneficial impact on India's own thinking about regionalism. Articulated by a Neighbourhood First policy, we now consciously seek to ensure that our neighbours also benefit from our growth and prosperity. The growing number of regional infrastructure projects supported by India is a sign of our seriousness. As SAARC is constrained by differences on terrorism and connectivity, attention may shift to the BIMSTEC grouping in the Bay of Bengal which is more united on the benefits of regionalism. to take forward this agenda.

(v) I would also credit ASEAN with contributing significantly to our understanding of the role that people of Indian origin abroad can play in India's relationship with the world. Indeed, there are few better examples of networking and bridging than the diaspora of this region.

(vi) Not least is the catalytic role that South East Asia has played in the revival of India's historical linkages and interests. The Nalanda concept as we know it today literally started here. Since then, it has emerged as an encouragement to a broader Indian embrace of its Buddhist history and heritage and a more central place for that in our people to people contacts.

13. It goes almost without saying that India's bilateral relationships with ASEAN member states have grown in tandem with its broader regional engagement. In the case of Indonesia, long standing political and security cooperation has been strengthened by increasing economic activity, especially in resources and commodities. This holds true for Malaysia as well, buttressed by the bridging role of persons of Indian origin. Malaysian companies have been especially active in the development of Indian infrastructure. Both countries are important partners in efforts to counter radicalisation and combat extremism. With Thailand, cultural affinities add further texture to its role as a hub for manufacturing and trading. Singapore, of course, has been functioning as India's gateway and is valued as a critical economic and security partner. With the Philippines, we are seeking to exploit more fully the potential for trade and investment. A longstanding presence in Brunei has now acquired a more contemporary relevance with focus on energy. Where Cambodia and Laos are concerned, India has been a steady partner in development as much in cultural cooperation. Vietnam is a well established strategic partner and our cooperation across a broad range of economic, developmental and security issues will deepen ever further. India's direct interface with ASEAN is through Myanmar where the political transition is expected to help further broaden our developmental and commercial presence. Leadership level exchanges and contacts with all ASEAN states

have visibly deepened in the last three years and we should see that culminate on the occasion of the silver jubilee.

14. In this changing landscape, few would dispute that the evolving India-China relationship has a direct implication for ASEAN, for the larger Asia Pacific, and perhaps even globally. We are all aware by now of the complexity inherent in the rise of two major powers near simultaneously, that too in close proximity. That the powers in question are civilizational ones, with positive far history and difficult near history, adds to the challenge. The big debate is about the opportunities and risks that emanate from this twin rise. Skewing the analysis in the direction of one at the expense of the other could mislead us. In truth, the India-China relationship by now has acquired so many dimensions and so much substance that reducing it to black and white argumentation cannot be a serious proposition. It is not only that India and China have stakes in each other; the world and especially ASEAN has a vested interest in this matter.
15. This is not to suggest that old problems have been all addressed or that new issues will not arise. India has an alarming trade deficit that in our view emanates from obstacles to market access in China. Negotiations on the long-standing boundary dispute also still continue. Differences on issues like terrorism, nuclear energy access and connectivity initiatives have also acquired some prominence. But the fact is that today, India-China relations are really multi-faceted. Last month, when the leaders of the two countries met at Astana, they reached consensus on two key points: (a) that at a time of global uncertainty, India-China relations are a factor of stability, and (b) in their relationship, India and China must not allow differences to become disputes. This consensus underlines the strategic maturity with which the two countries must continue to approach each other.
16. ASEAN also has a natural interest in the growing ties between India and Japan. Gradually and steadily, Japan has emerged as a special strategic partner with whom India increasingly shares a global agenda. The planned Shinkansen high speed rail project is the symbol of these changes. But they do reflect a much more profound shift underway, one that involves a significant Japanese commitment to infrastructure modernisation in India, a substantially larger investment footprint and the accompanying eco-system that nurtures these processes. ASEAN nations are, of course, very familiar with these developments though perhaps the scale in India is of a different order. Equally relevant is that as a country that shares similar values and principles, Japan is comfortable partnering India as it assumes greater security responsibilities. We also see the enhanced synergy between India and Japan on connectivity and maritime security as a positive for ASEAN nations.
17. The big question today in the world is the global strategic approach of the United States. This matters to India as much as it does to ASEAN nations, and indeed to the entire world. There seem to be a number of parallel processes at work. The United States is, generally speaking, reframing its terms of engagement with the world. In some arenas, there may be a redefinition of its objectives. In others, we may be looking at a redrawing of its posture. At the same time, let us be clear what is not happening: the US is not withdrawing from the world. On the contrary, it is seeking to get what it hopes to be a better deal from the rest of the world. These are still early days. It is important not to jump to conclusions. The continued presence of the United States in the Asia-Pacific is an important factor in the calculations of all nations. Developing a nuanced understanding of the unfolding situation is a must for policy makers, as well as analysts.
18. In this background, it is important that India and the ASEAN have honest conversations on the big issues of the day. To my mind, there are essentially five that will require focused deliberation in the times to come:
 - i. Connectivity is today the new 'Great Game'. India shares the international community's desire for enhancing physical as well as softer forms of connectivity. We believe in transparent development of infrastructure and the use of responsible debt financing practices, while underlining respect for sovereignty

and territorial integrity, ensuring TOT, rule of law and the protection of the environment. This is a principled approach and we are always open to discussions.

ii. Maritime security is a second key concern. India supports respect for freedom of navigation, overflight and commerce throughout the region. It expects nations to resolve territorial and maritime disputes peacefully and in accordance with international law. And just as important, we practise what we preach. India is also increasingly shouldering responsibilities in this area. In recent years, we have concluded White Shipping Agreements with many countries and emerged as first responders in HADR situations, from Fiji to Yemen. The Indian Ocean is a collaborative arena with vast potential that, as the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka reminded me recently, is the largest English-speaking region in the world.

iii. Terrorism and radicalization is a shared challenge, one where India would be open to working more purposefully with ASEAN members. Perhaps, there should be greater appreciation that it is India that insulates this region from many of the viruses proliferating to its West. In an era when networking amongst terrorists is reaching serious proportions, societies facing threats must respond more cohesively. In particular, they must be clear that there is no justification for terrorism on any grounds.

iv. Economic globalization is under pressure and even as we counter protectionism, it is important to analyze the causes for this trend. The virtues of preferential trade arrangements are less self-apparent today, possibly because many of its outcomes have been very one-sided. Clearly, PTA/FTAs are not the same as openness. Arriving at a more balanced position would require a more objective assessment of how they have worked so far.

v. Finally, advancing an Asian security architecture founded on commonly accepted norms and rules. The centrality of ASEAN to its evolution is indisputable.

19. India and ASEAN have powerful convergences that can become the basis for a higher level of cooperation. We would hope that what ASEAN sees looking West is a more confident nation with strong economic prospects, positive demographics, substantial unmet demands, leapfrogging capabilities, one that is active on global issues, shouldering more responsibilities and is a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific. Insofar as India is concerned, a grouping of 600 million people with an impressive growth record is in itself a priority. ASEAN countries have a strong stake in the issues that matter for India. Their ability to harmonize global contradictions and create credible meeting points will, if anything, become even more important. India has an engagement with South-East Asia in history going back millennia. Commerce, connectivity and culture have been its hallmark. Our contemporary presence is as natural in this region as it has been in the past. And perhaps, there can be no better testimony than in Singapore – connected as it is to 15 Indian cities, hosting six thousand Indian companies and engaging India in every conceivable sector. Our expectation is that the Silver Jubilee will really drive home the message that India and ASEAN are closely aligned in our quest for prosperity, stability and security.



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