

Promoting Bilateralism: India's Relations with Major Southeast Asian Countries in The Post-Cold War Era

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Abstract:

It is very clear on going through India's engagement with the countries of Southeast Asia that in the initial years of their formation both the side had tried to build up strong relations. But as their relations fell into the grip of the cold war, they lost focus and their relations suffered a major setback. It was only after the cold war ended that they were able to concentrate on building their relationship.

Keywords: Bilateralism, war, engagement.

Look-East Policy

Phase-I

The most basic question that confronts one who seeks to study the 'Look East policy' is how and what brought about this 'strategic shift' in the Indian Foreign Policy. The most obvious reason, which indeed is also true, is that the cold war had come to an end. The demise of the Soviet Union had made India lose its major ally in the world and India needed new friends. Coupled with this was the economic imperative that the economic reform process launched in the country needed foreign help. But it was all not that simple and sudden as it seems on the surface.

"India's strategy of engagement with Southeast Asia starts before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In the late 1980s, India began to initiate peaceful overtures to ASEAN and had called this process "Look East Destiny".² In fact, the entire period from 1985 to 1995 has been called a period of 'Readjustments and Resurgence' for ASEAN-India relations. No foreign policy can be successful until it is received with, if not equal, but at least minimal reciprocation. "..... the countries of Southeast Asia became more receptive to Indian diplomatic and economic overtures in the 1980s than they had been in the previous decade."³

Rajiv Gandhi took over as the Prime Minister after his mother's death in 1984 and his foreign policy "promised a more benign regional climate. India promised harmony instead of hegemony. This phase saw the formal inauguration of South Asian Association for Regional Co-Operation (SAARC). ASEAN states followed, the development of regionalism in South Asia with high hopes and spoke warmly of the possibility of inter-regional co-operation between SAARC and ASEAN."⁴

This comfort in relations can be proved by the fact that there was a great degree of ASEAN -India diplomatic interaction to solve the Kampuchean issue and India got involved in finding a solution to the issue. An ASEAN delegation consisting of three members from Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei came to India in

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² Yahya, Faizal, 'India and Southeast Asia Revisited', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Volume 25, Number 1, April 2003.

³ Ayoob, Mohammed, *India and Southeast Asia: Indian Perceptions and Policies*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore: Routledge, 1990.

⁴ Sridharan, Kripa, 'The ASEAN Region in India's Foreign Policy' (Chapter 7), *Readjustments and Resurgence: India-ASEAN Relations, 1985-1995*, pp.163-164, Dartmouth Publishing Company Lmt.

August 1985 to explain ASEAN's view on the Kampuchean issue. After that, the Indian Foreign Secretary AP Venkateswaran visited various ASEAN capitals and the Prime Minister himself went to Indonesia and Thailand.

It is considered that the economic downturn and the recession that hit the ASEAN economies, rising protectionism in the West and the spiralling Japanese Yen also compelled them to diversify the relationship with India and China.

On the Indian side too, the Gulf War had affected the Indian Foreign economic Policy badly. The long Iran-Iraq war had "reduced appreciably the attractiveness of Gulf and the Middle East as markets for India's surplus manpower and for the country's technical and industrial expertise."⁵

ASEAN was not fully satisfied with India's role in solving the Kampuchean crisis. In fact, there were quite a lot of dissatisfactions. The Indian naval expansion also created considerable doubts and fears in the minds of the ASEAN countries. But it needs to be understood that a background had started emerging for a relationship that took off in the nineties.

India's LEP was officially defined and articulated in September 1994, by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in his Singapore lecture. In his lecture Rao stressed the point that India's historical and cultural relations were very old and strong and there was nothing new in India looking towards reinforcing co-operative linkages with eastern neighbours. He laid emphasis on building strong economic and security relationship between India and its eastern neighbours. He had stressed the point that India's historical and cultural relations were very old and strong and there was nothing new in India looking towards reinforcing cooperative linkages with its eastern neighbours, says S.D.Muni⁶. Rao was very clear about the long-term vision behind the policy. "The Asia Pacific would be the springboard for our leap into the global market place," said the Prime Minister.⁷ He declared further, "much more is possible and desirable. India, therefore wants a real and sizeable jump." There was certainly nothing new about India looking Eastward and therefore, the current phase which began in the nineties has been rightly called the fourth wave of the country's 'eastward engagement' over the centuries, the other three being historical or pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial and contemporary.⁸

Phase II of the Look East Policy: "Though the policy was given an initial thrust with the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visiting China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Singapore and India becoming a sectoral dialogue partner with ASEAN in 1992, the policy was pursued in fits and starts till recently. It is only since the beginning of this century, India has given a big push to this policy by becoming a summit level partner of ASEAN (2002) and getting involved in some regional initiatives such as the BIMSTEC and the Ganga Mekong Cooperation and now becoming a member of the East Asia Summit (EAS) in December, 2005."⁹ It is not that the Governments which succeeded Narasimha Rao's did not pay heed to the policy. But India's own internal politically unstable conditions and the economic down turn that hit the economies of Southeast Asia around 1997-98, did not help gain anything substantial in the development of relations during this period.

The Second Phase of the Policy was very well articulated in the Singapore Lecture delivered by PM Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2002. He called the Southeast region "one of the focal points of India's foreign

⁵ Ayooob, Mohammed, Op.cit.

⁶ Muni, S. D., *India's 'Look-East Policy': The Strategic Dimension*, ISAS Working Paper#121, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, 1 February 2011.

⁷ Narasimha Rao Lecture Quote taken from Ghoshal, Baladas: Introduction in Baladas Ghoshal edited *India and Southeast Asia, Challenges and Opportunities*, Konark Publishers, Delhi in association with India International Centre, 1996

⁸ Muni, S. D., *India's 'Look-East Policy': The Strategic Dimension*, ISAS Working Paper#121, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, 1 February 2011

⁹ Kuppaswamy, C. S., *India's Look-East Policy: More Aggressive, Better Dividends*, Paper No.1663, South Asia Analysis Group, 3.1.2006, Source:

<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers17%5Cpaper1663.html>

policy, strategic concerns and economic interests.” Adding further, he said, “It is a fundamental fact of geography that India is in the immediate neighbourhood of ASEAN. We share land and maritime borders with Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand. India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal are closer to some ASEAN states than to the Indian mainland. The vital commercial sea lanes between West Asia and South East Asia straddle the Indian mainland and its island territories.” He went on to add how the relationship between Southeast Asia had developed from mere economic to politico-strategic. The noteworthy point in the Speech is that the Prime Minister continuously spoke of improving relations not only with Southeast Asia but the entire East Asian Region or the entire Asia-Pacific. He said, “India's belonging to the Asia Pacific community is a geographical fact and a political reality. It does not require formal membership of any regional organization for its recognition or sustenance.”¹⁰ The Look-East in its second phase has, therefore, extended to cover the entire Asia Pacific. But South-East Asia continues to be vital to it. External Affairs Mr. Yashwant Sinha in a Speech he gave at the Harvard University said “The first phase of India's ‘Look East’ policy was ASEAN-centred and focussed primarily on trade and investment linkages. The new phase of this policy is characterised by an expanded definition of ‘East’, extending from Australia to East Asia, with ASEAN at its core.”¹¹

The way India has engaged with the various countries of the region in the Asia-Pacific in the recent years proves that the ambit of the Look East Policy has extended beyond Southeast Asia.

The Need for Bilateral Relations

India has tried to engage with Southeast Asia both at the bilateral as well as the multilateral front. There is no doubt about the fact that on the world stage ASEAN has emerged as the representative expressing the viewpoint of the countries on all important issues. And, therefore, certainly India has to engage with ASEAN as an organisation. The divergence of the approaches of the member countries is both evident in economic matters as well as strategic matters. “ ASEAN as an organisation has been provided with very limited authority and resources intentionally by the members to pursue economic co-operation and to acquire expertise or capacity for monitoring developments in the member countries, India will also need to devise country specific bilateral strategies and tactics.”¹²

Another reason sighted in support of the need for a bilateral approach, is that expanded ASEAN is considerably more heterogenous in its economic structure and level of development and its political philosophy and orientation. The new entrants to ASEAN like Cambodia and Laos are far behind countries like Singapore and Thailand in their economic development and infrastructure. Vietnam is different in its political philosophy as basically it is a communist country. “.....therefore, it has become increasingly difficult to evolve a common ASEAN view on economic and other issues.”¹³ This does not mean that ASEAN is a weak organisation but it is a well known fact that multilateralism has its own limitations and we can experience this even in European Union which is looked upon as the most successful of multilateral organisations. The viewpoints of countries of Southeast Asia apart, another factor is also the distinct history of relations India has had with each of these countries, which makes bilateralism necessary.

It is a well known fact that multilateralism has its own limitations and we can experience this even

¹⁰ Vajpayee, Atal Bihari, *India's Perspective on ASEAN and the Asia Pacific Region*, addressed at the Annual Singapore Lecture, April 9, 2002, Source: <http://www.asean.org/2787.htm>

¹¹ GoI, MEA, A speech by Minister, External Affairs, Yashwant Sinha at Harvard University on 29 September, 2003, Source: <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=55037013>

¹² Asher, Mukul G, Rahul Sen & Sadhana Srivastav, *Asean-India: Emerging Economic Opportunities*, Revised version of the paper presented at the ASEAN-INDIA workshop on Economic Issues organized by the French Center de Sciences Humanise, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, and School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, March 17-18, 2001. Source: <http://www.cpsindia.org/emergingeconomic.htm>

¹³ Ibid.

an EU which is regarded as the most successful of multilateral organisations.

India and Indonesia

Michel Leifer makes the following observations about the Indonesian Foreign Policy, “A common and consistent theme in Indonesia’s Foreign policy has been the need to overcome an intrinsic vulnerability, Paradoxically, however, a continuous sense of vulnerability has been combined with an equally continuous sense of regional entitlement base on pride in revolutionary achievement, size of population, land and maritime dimensions, natural resources and strategic location. That sense of regional achievement has been less than consistently displayed in open form; it has persisted none the less.”¹⁴ One also need to remember that ever since its independence Indonesia has seen a ‘succession of political systems’, from ‘a febrile Parliamentary Democracy to a Guided Democracy to its self-styled Pancasila Democracy’¹⁵. Says Leifer, “Changes in Political system have given rise to corresponding changes in the idiom of foreign policy.”

India-Indonesia relations did not take off immediately with the launch of India’s ‘Look-East Policy. According to G.V.C. Naidu, “India-Indonesia relations though started looking up in the aftermath of the Cold War but still weighed down by the past baggage unlike other countries of Southeast Asia - Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand.”¹⁶ A major factor for this was also the internal instabilities, which Indonesia was mired in the nineties. The Suharto period is debated a lot. Although under Suharto’s ‘New Order’, “Indonesia experienced significant economic growth and industrialization., he brutally suppressed separatist movements, abused human rights, restricted political parties, banned student protests and maintained only a veneer of democracy. In the years since his presidency, attempts to try him on charges of corruption and genocide failed due to his poor health. On the one hand, Suharto did preside over economic growth. On the other hand, much of this was lost during the 1997 crises, when it proved to be built on shaky foundations. He enriched himself and his family while many Indonesians still experienced poverty. He did nothing to nurture genuine democracy.”¹⁷ And therefore when the Indonesian economy suffered a major setback in 1997, the wrath of the people could not be controlled. “After months of economic downturn and political instability, events in Indonesia came to a crisis in mid-May 1998. Major price increases following the abolition of fuel subsidies (to meet the conditions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reform package) set off an explosion of popular anger, expressed in rioting and looting, resulting in the death of around 500 people. On 12 May, riot police fired on a demonstration at Trisakti University in Jakarta, killing six students. This gave added impetus to the already growing student-led mass movement calling for the resignation of President Suharto, an end to corruption and nepotism and for political reform. These events brought about the final collapse of support for President Suharto, whose popularity had been waning for several years and which began to crumble with the onset of major economic problems from the second half of 1997. In the wake of the riots and demonstrations, mounting pressure from elite elements for the President to step down culminated in calls by the Speaker of the Parliament and by 11 Cabinet ministers for Suharto to relinquish power. On 20 May, Suharto declared that he would call new elections but would not be a candidate. He did not say, however,

¹⁴ Leifer, Michael, ‘Indonesia’s Foreign policy, Change and Continuity’ in *Selected Works on Southeast Asia* Edited by Michael Leifer, Kin Wah Chin and Leo Suryadinata, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005, Source: http://books.google.com/books?id=B9kTZgZ0TWYC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=Indonesia%20Foreign%20Policy&f=false

¹⁵ Pancasila Democracy is a system of life for the state and society on the basis of people's sovereignty. It is inspired by the noble values of the Indonesian nation. Pancasila itself, which means the five principles, is the name given to the foundation of the Indonesian Republic. The five principles of Pancasila are Belief in the One and Only God; A Just and civilized humanity; the Unity of Indonesia; Democracy guided by the inner wisdom of deliberations of representatives; and Social Justice for all the Indonesian people, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, Manila, Philippines, Source: http://www.kbrimanila.org.ph/about_indonesia/history-democracy.html

¹⁶ Naidu, G. V. C., School of International Studies, JNU, New Delhi, *Deergayu India-Indonesia Relations*, January 31, 2011 Source: <http://www.vifindia.org/article/2011/january/31/Deergayu-India-Indonesia-Relations>

¹⁷ Suharto, New world Encyclopaedia, Source: <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Suharto>

when the elections would be held or under what electoral arrangements. This move, together with the call by Muslim leader, Amien Rais, not to take to the streets, succeeded in preventing the huge popular mobilisation planned for the next day. But the resounding rejection of Suharto's plan by almost all elements in Indonesian politics forced the President, on 21 May, to announce his resignation.”¹⁸

After Suharto's resignation in 1998, Jusuf Habibie was sworn in as the Interim President of the Republic of Indonesia. The end of Suharto rule marked the end of the 'New Order' period of Thirty years. In August 1999, according to a UN sponsored Agreement between Indonesia and Portugal, a Referendum was held under UN supervision in East Timor over the question of special autonomy or independence to East Timor. There was a heavy turnout of voters. “On Sept. 4, UN General-Secretary Kofi Annan announced that 78.5 percent of East Timorese voters had chosen independence from Indonesia.”¹⁹ After the results of the referendum, there was violence, which is said to have caused by pro-integration militia supported by Indonesian military. To restore peace, the United Nations sent an Australian led international peacekeeping force and the administration was taken over by United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). In February, 2000, the peacekeeping forces were withdrawn and military command was transferred to United Nations. Formal independence was granted on 20 May, 2002 when East Timor became a sovereign country. It became a member of the UN on September 27, 2002.

Thus, the post Suharto Indonesia had to struggle a lot with the democratic process, economic crisis and ethnic turmoil.

Indonesia is the biggest country of the region. It would not be an exaggeration to say that under Sukarno and Suharto Indonesia always saw an important role for it within the region. “ That Indonesia-despite being the world's largest Muslim nation, third biggest democracy, and fourth most populous country-has had an extremely low international profile is one of the major paradoxes of international relations of our time,” says C. Rajamohan.²⁰ And this is what one needs to remember while analyzing Indonesia's position in South-East Asia. Indonesia holds a special position amongst its fellow countries of the regions of South-East Asia. Indonesia sees an important role for itself within the region as well as outside it. This image of Indonesia for itself comes in conflict with India's position in Asia and India's world-view. Says Pankaj Kumar Jha, “Apprehensions led to concern over India's hegemony in Southeast Asia particularly the 'blue water navy'. The trajectory of India and Indonesia relations changed positively after Rajeev Gandhi's visit in 1986 and his assurance about India's benign credentials.”

While taking a look at India-Indonesia relations one needs to remember that both the countries were the founding members of the NAM and therefore, on that front, there exists a commonality in their worldviews. The India- Indonesian relationship is an example of economic as well as strategic interests. “The two countries, the second and the third largest in Asia in terms of population, face similar challenges. Both are strongly committed to secularism as a way of uniting their large and diverse populations. They may be at the early stages of economic development-with large portions of their populations still mired in poverty-but as the trends of the last decade show, they are on the threshold unleashing their economic potential. India and Indonesia have embraced market economies, and both are furthermore members of the G20.”²¹

The above reasons explain the gap of fourteen years for a bilateral visit between the two countries.

¹⁸ Sherlock, Stephen and B. J. Habibie, *Indonesia's Interim President? Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Group*, Research Note 451997-98, Parliament Library, Parliament of Australia, 25 May 1998, Source: <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/Pubs/rn/1997-98/98rn45.htm>

¹⁹ Shah, Angilee, *Staff Writer Records of East Timor*, UCLA International Institute, 1999, Source: <http://www.international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=53444>

²⁰ Raja Mohan, C., *A Multi-polar Asia*, Washington: The Jakarta Post, Tuesday, March 3, 2009, Source: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/02/16/washington-jakarta-and-a-multipolar-asia.html>

²¹ Bayuni, Endy, 'Indonesia-India Relations :It's Business as Unusual', *Asia-Pacific Bulletin*, Number 93, February 17, 2011, Source: East West Centre.Org/ Washington

Prime Minister Mr. A.B. Vajpayee went to Indonesia in 2001. The last visit being that of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1986. In 1992, the Prime Minister Mr. Narsimha Rao did visit Indonesia but that was to take part in the NAM Summit. From the Indonesian side, President Suharto came to India twice. First in 1993 to attend the education for all summit and then for the G-15 summit in 1994. Although, on both occasions bilateral talks were held between the two countries.

Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid took over as the President of the Republic of Indonesia after Mr. Habibie. He was the first democratically elected President of the country. Wahid was a supporter of plurality and multiculturalism. And his foreign policy, as his domestic policies, reflected his vision.²² Wahid visited India in 2000. His foreign minister indicated that Indonesia was for building a politico-strategic friendship with China as well as New Delhi. Wahid mooted the idea that India, Indonesia, China, Japan and Singapore could work together as a new five-power entity. He said that this should happen not only in the economic sphere but also in the political and cultural sphere. "I believe that Asians should be stronger in presenting "their face" vis-à-vis the rest of the world."²³ Wahid's visit certainly brought an upswing in India-Indonesia ties. . Talks were held with the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, and the then Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi. Discussions centred on improving trade relations and co-operating in infrastructure development.²⁴

Ms. Megawati Soekarnoputri took over as the President of Indonesia in 2001. The September eleven attacks took place during her tenure. And worse came in the form of Bali bombings for Indonesia. Indonesia being a large Muslim country, the two incidents did have bearing on Indonesian foreign policy. Military Aid to Indonesia by the United States had already been restricted since 1991 and then completely banned since 1999 owing to human rights abuses in East Timor. Just after the September attacks Ms. Megawati visited the United States and it was being expected that military ties would be restored. And in turn Indonesia would give support to the US War on Terror. But, before Ms. Megawati reached back, her Vice President's remarks were enough to prove that domestic public opinion would not let her do so.²⁵ As was proved gradually, Megawati could not support the US policies as was expected of her. In her address to the General Assembly in 2003, she even "called on the West to re-examine its "war on terrorism" strategies and criticised US policy in the Middle East and Iraq. Ms Megawati said countries whose citizens were being targeted "should review their conventional anti-terrorism policies, particularly in dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict". She called on the big powers to ensure that "all the parties involved are given just and equal treatment" in the Middle East. She said many Muslims in Indonesia believed that once "the major powers behave in a more just manner and make clear their impartiality in the Middle East, then most of the root causes of terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam, which in any circumstances cannot be justified, would have been resolved".²⁶ Ms. Megawati visited India in 2002. The two countries agreed to co-operate in the field of energy security and counter-terrorism. President, K.R Narayanan in his statement at the reception given to the Indonesian President said, "ASEAN-India relations can mature only when India has the goodwill and co-operation of ASEAN's largest member-country."²⁷

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Indonesia in 2003 when he went to take part in the

²² Calleja, David, 'Abdurrahman Wahid: Indonesia's Visionary Democrat', *Foreign Policy Journal*, January 11, 2010, Source: <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/01/11/abdurrahman-wahid-indonesia%E2%80%99s-visionary-democrat/>

²³ Suryanarayan, P. S., 'Wahid Sees Big Global Role For India', *The Hindu*, March 27, 2000
Source: <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2000/05/27/stories/03270006.htm>

²⁴ The Hindu, 'Forging Ties with Jakarta', *Opinion*, 11 February, 2000.

²⁵ Biddle, Kurt, *Indonesia - US Military Ties: September 11th And After*, Edition 70, April-June, 2002, Source: <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edition-70/indonesia-us-military-ties>

²⁶ Wilkinson, Marian, 'Megawati Hits Out at US War on Terrorism', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 25, 2003, Source: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/09/24/1064083064573.html>

²⁷ Aneja, Atul, 'India, Indonesia Anchor New Partnership', *The Hindu*, April 4, 2002, Source: <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2002/04/04/stories/2002040402621200.htm>

ASEAN summit in Bali. PM Dr. Manmohan Singh visited Jakarta and Bandung to take part in the African-Asian Summit in 2005.

The high point of the India-Indonesia relations was the signing of the India-Indonesia 'Strategic Partnership' in 2005 during Prime Minister Yudhoyono's visit to India. The Joint Statement issued on the occasion said, "As the world's largest democracies, and as independent-minded nations with a long tradition of internationalism, the combined voice of Indonesia and India can make a difference in international affairs."²⁸ The two sides agreed to collaborate in the field of defence, space research, while agreeing to set up a joint study group to examine the feasibility of a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement. India also expressed its happiness at the support it was being given by Indonesia for East Asia Summit membership. The relations received further impetus when PM Yudhoyono was made Chief Guest at the Republic Day Function at New Delhi in January, 2011.

"Indonesia may trade with China but it sings and dances with India. If Gandhi and Nehru or Indonesia's Founding Fathers, Muhammad Hatta and Sjahrir were alive today, they would say that India and Indonesia have a moral duty to create a vision of a democratic and pluralist Asia."²⁹ The most important point of convergence between the two countries is that both are pluralistic societies. An article in The Jakarta Post quotes the noted strategic thinker Dr. C. Rajamohan where he recalled in a seminar that in the late nineties the Singapore government spoke about Asian values as opposed to Western values, but how the discussion came to an abrupt end, when the people of Jakarta poured out into the streets demanding democracy in 1998.³⁰

Another important issue that Indonesia is very sensitive about is the patrolling of the Malacca Straits. The Malacca Straits is one of the busiest shipping routes of oil shippers between the Persian Gulf and Asia-Pacific regions and over 90,000 ships passage through it each year.³¹ After the September 11 attacks, concern has been raised about the Straits as ships moving through it could be a very easy target. The Bali bombings of 2002 were seen as a proof that terrorists had bases in the region of Southeast Asia. The United States even considered at one point of time to open a second front in the area as part of its 'Global War on Terror'.³² Before the threat of terrorism also lies the threat of piracy.

As a result of international concern and pressure, the Trilateral Coordinated Patrols, codenamed MALSINDO, Malacca Straits Coordinated Patrols was launched by the Chiefs of Armed Forces from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, on 20 Jul 04. But the Indonesian concerns can very well be understood from the following comments of Indonesia's navy chief, Admiral Bernard Kent Sondakh, who said in an interview that foreign governments - including the US - were primarily interested in the waterway because it was economically strategic, rather than because of terrorism fears.³³

Being the most formidable military power in Southeast Asia, Indonesia can effectively work with India in ensuring safety of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) and tackle non-traditional security challenges in the Indian Ocean. Both have a vested interest in ensuring that China's hegemony in the region does not go uncontested. Their location makes them crucial in the emerging maritime calculus in the region as they together control the entry point from the Indian Ocean to the Bay of Bengal in the north and Malacca

²⁸ The Hindu, *India, Indonesia to Establish "Strategic Partnership" in Tune With Realities*, Nov. 24, 2005, Source: <http://www.hindu.com/2005/11/24/stories/2005112405871200.htm>

²⁹ Alisjahbana, Tamalia, 'India-Indonesia Strategic Partnership', *The Jakarta Post*, May 18, 2010, Source: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/05/18/india-indonesia-strategic-partnership.html>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Daily News and Analysis, *Warships And Military Aircraft Patrol Malacca Straits*, March 5, 2010, Source: http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report_warships-and-military-aircraft-patrol-malacca-straits_1355607

³² Nolan, Robert, *The War on Terror: Reconsidering the Second Front*, Foreign Policy Association, October 17, 2002, Source: http://www.fpa.org/newsletter_info2583/newsletter_info_sub_list.htm?section=The%20War%20on%20Terror%3A%20Reconsidering%20the%2093Second%20Front

³³ BBC News, *Anti Piracy Drive In Malacca Straits*, July 20, 2004, Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3908821.stm>

Straits to the east. Viewing Indian maritime presence as largely benign, Indonesia has openly invited India to help the littoral states in the region in maintaining security in the Malacca Strait. Jakarta now also views India as a major source of military hardware. Joint naval exercises and patrols as well as regular port calls by their respective navies have been a regular feature of India-Indonesian naval cooperation for some time now.³⁴

India and Myanmar

Myanmar is one country where India has had to be very cautious in developing its relations. India is caught between its commitment towards democratic principles at the international level and its strategic interests. Indian foreign policy is said to oscillate between realism and idealism when it comes to Myanmar³⁵. And due to this, the relations between the two countries also remain on a roller-coaster. For once, even if India ignores the international criticism, which specially comes from the United States of America³⁶. And, if, one also accepts the argument that the present Indian foreign policy set up is only guided by practical considerations, it is a difficult situation for the country owing to its proximity to Aung San Suu Kyi and the pressure of the lobbying of the large number of Burmese refugees present in India. There is a considerable population of Burmese refugees living in India who are critical of the government's engagement with the military junta. On the visit of the Burmese head of State to India last year they staged demonstrations and protests. According to estimates, there are officially about 3, 500 Myanmar refugees in India, and there are about 4,500 asylum seekers. But unofficial data proclaim that there are about 100000 Burmese refugees in the country which reside mostly in the North-East³⁷. Highly critical of India for hosting the Myanmar military leadership in New Delhi, the noble laureate Amartya Sen said, "I have to say that as a loyal Indian citizen, it breaks my heart to see the prime minister of my democratic country and one of the most humane and sympathetic political leaders in the world engage in welcoming the butchers from Myanmar and to be photographed in a state of cordial proximity."³⁸ The noble laureate Aung San Suu Kyi on her release this November expressed the following opinion, "India must live up to the reputation of being the biggest democracy in the world and not be dictated by its commercial interests in Myanmar." She said that she was not against India's engagement with Than Shwe's ruling military regime but wanted India to play an active role in democratisation of Myanmar and have parleys with her National league for Democracy party. "We would like India to play a more active role in trying to help in the process of democratisation of Burma and I would like the Indian government to engage more with us... who are working more with democracy," she said.³⁹ In the Wikileaks Reports (India Cables), which had great furore in early 2011, there was a lot of information about what went on between the Government of India and the military junta. The reports were a clear reflection of the fact that India has in the recent years has been caught in the dilemma of whether to support the democracy movement or engage with the present rulers.⁴⁰

India and Singapore

Singapore has a symbolic importance in India's 'Look-East Policy' as it was here that the Prime Minister P. V. Narsimha Rao had made the formal announcement of the policy.⁴¹

Singapore was the foremost country to respond to India's 'Look-East Policy'. It would not be an

³⁴ Harsh V. Pant: Looking Eastward, Outlook, January 25, 2011, Source: <http://www.outlookindia.com/printarticle.aspx?270191>

³⁵ See Renaud, Egreetau, India and Burma Re/Myanmar relations, From Idealism to Realism, Conference on India and Burma Re/Myanmar relations, From Idealism to Realism, India International Centre, New Delhi, 11th September, 2003

³⁶ <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/full-text-of-obamas-parliament-address/134649-3.html>

³⁷ <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Burmese-refugees-disappointed-over-Than-Shwe-s-India-visit/Article1-578440.aspx>

³⁸ <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Amartya-Sen-comes-down-heavily-on-India-s-Myanmar-policy/Article1-615764.aspx>

³⁹ http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_aung-san-suu-kyi-for-more-active-role-by-india-for-democracy-in-myanmar_1478320

⁴⁰ Subramaniam Nirupama, *Maybe Myanmar is our Pakistan*, The Hindu, March 15, 2011

⁴¹ Narsimha Rao, P.V., Singapore Lecture

exaggeration to say that Singapore had always wanted India to make its presence known in the region and it was very happy when India launched the 'Look-East Policy'. How keen was Singapore to respond to Indian overtures is clear from the following excerpts from Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's Speech at the 37th Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture, "In 1992, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao met Singapore's then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Non-Aligned Conference in Jakarta and persuaded him to visit India with a delegation of Singapore businessmen. PM Goh visited India from 23-30 January 1994 and returned enthused. In January 1996, I visited New Delhi and spoke to civil servants and businessmen on the changes that Prime Minister Rao and his team were putting into place."⁴²

Singapore was not only happy about India's 'Look-East Policy' but also about India's economic reforms of which Lee Kuan Yew had been a very strong advocate. For Singapore, Business is Foreign Policy. Lee himself had been a keen India watcher. It was no wonder that Prime Minister Rao chose Singapore to announce his landmark policy.

It was at the Singapore Summit in 1992 that India joined ASEAN as a Sectoral Dialogue Partner and was made full Dialogue Partner in 1995 and finally a Summit Partner in 2001. "It should be acknowledged that Singapore played a key role in renewing India's links with ASEAN. Singapore was India's country co-ordinator since India became a sectoral dialogue partner."⁴³ Singapore also helped India in getting into the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

One thing that is very intriguing is that Singaporeans never approves of the Indian system of democratic decision-making.⁴⁴ They rather hold it as the root cause of the problems of corruption and delay in making decisions in our system. In a private conversation with the Researcher a senior official at the Singapore Consulate, not wanting to be quoted, expressed surprise how a system claiming to be a working democracy could have such rampant corruption. He even said that if India, foreign policy was being taken forward, the credit was to its private entrepreneurs. If one goes through the interview of Lee Kuan Yew in Sunanda K. Datta Ray's book, one finds a whole set of instructions Lee has for Indians to improve their system. There was also a lot of furore over the Wikileaks disclosure of comments by a senior Singaporean official who is said to have criticised Indians severely. And yet, Singapore is so close to India.

With Cambodia, Laos, and Brunei India's relationship is in a very nascent stage. Along with trade, India is also helping in the development of infrastructure of these countries.

⁴² Yew, Lee Kuan, 'India in an Asian Renaissance', (Speech by Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew at the 37th Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture on September 2005, New Delhi) Source: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/24803458/Speech-by-Lee-Kuan-Yew-at-37th-Jawaharlal-Nehru-Memorial-Lecture-in-New-Delhi>

⁴³ Suryanarayan, V., 'India – Singapore Relations: An Over View' C3S Paper No.140 dated April 2, 2008, (Paper presented in the International Seminar on India-Southeast Asia – Strategic Convergence in the 21st Century, at Centre for SAARC Studies, Andhra University, Waltair, March 26-28, 2008)

⁴⁴ Interview with the Researcher at the Consulate of Singapore on 22 December, 2010