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# India's Look - East Policy: The Economic and Strategic Importance of North Eastern Region

Dr. D. Ramakrishnan

**Abstract**— India's Look East policy, which aims to foster closer ties with Southeast Asian nations, has become one of the most important cornerstones of its foreign policy. In the past few years, there has been an even greater urgency for India to accelerate economic and security cooperation with Southeast Asia. Apart from the obvious economic benefits, India also wants to send an unequivocal message to China: it wants to become a key regional power and will achieve this by forging closer ties with countries in Southeast Asia to counter China's increasing dominance in the region. The Look-East Policy is being embarked upon with the presupposition that the improving trade ties between India and ASEAN will certainly elevate the North-East out of the menace of insurgency, poverty and economic backwardness.

However, a need is felt to focus the benefits of these cooperation's more sharply on the Northeastern region - a natural bridge between India and Southeast Asia. A new paradigm of development whereby foreign policy initiatives blend seamlessly into the national economic development is felt and there is a need to make these structures work for the Northeastern region. While colonial rulers built railways and roads mostly to take tea, coal, oil and other resources out of the northeastern region, the disruption of old trade routes remained. In its efforts to bailout Northeast India from the difficulties as a result of the loss of connectivity and market access following the partition of 1947 and recognition of region's geographical proximity with East and Southeast Asia and, India focus the benefits of this cooperation more sharply on the Northeastern region. The Look East policy has the potential to undo the effects of colonial geopolitics as well as transform the region by opening borders for trade and commerce. The Look-East Policy is expected to usher in a new era of development for the North East through network of pipelines, connectivity, communication and trade. Hence this paper will make an attempt by analyzing the geo-political, economic and security issues between India and ASEAN and the need for socio, economic, and political development of the North Eastern Region which is the gateway of ASEAN countries.

**Keywords**— Look-East Policy, North-Eastern Region, Southeast Asia, geopolitics, political development, ASEAN.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) comprises of Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam. India's focus on a strengthened and multi-faceted relationship with ASEAN is an outcome of the significant changes in the world's political and economic scenario since the early 1990s and India's own march towards economic liberalisation. India's search for economic space resulted in the 'Look East Policy'. The Look East Policy has today matured into a dynamic and action oriented 'Act East Policy. PM at the 12th ASEAN India Summit and the 9th East Asia Summit held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, in November, 2014, formally enunciated the Act East Policy. Apart from ASEAN, India has taken other policy initiatives in the region that involve some members of ASEAN like BIMSTEC, MGC etc. India is also an active participant in several regional forums like the Asia-Europe Meeting, East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting + (ADMM+) and Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum. There has been steady progress in the ASEAN-India partnership since the Look East Policy was launched in 1991. India became sectoral dialogue partners in 1992 and full dialogue partners in 1996. Since 2002, India has annual Summits with ASEAN along with China, Japan and Republic of Korea. There are 30 Dialogue Mechanisms cutting across all the sectors including 7 ministerial level meetings.

Jawaharlal Nehru the first Indian Prime Minister in his book, *The Discovery of India*, in 1944: prophetically says, The Pacific is likely to take the place of the Atlantic in the future as the nerve center of the world. Though not directly a Pacific state, India will inevitably exercise an important influence there. India will also develop as the center of economic and political activity in the Indian Ocean area, in South-East Asia, right up to the Middle East. Her position gives an economic and strategic importance in a part of the world which is going to develop in the future.

Relevance of India's Foreign Policy for North East Region: Political, Economic and Security. Further, Nehru

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wrote, India will have to play a very great part in security problems of Asia and the Indian Ocean, more especially of the Middle East and South-East Asia. The statement emphasizes that India's 'Look East' Policy in its futuristic perspective is evolving strategic and geographical scenario in the region. In this prospect India requires to play a vital role to face the challenges and opportunities in the field of geographical, historical, political, economic and institutional with the neighbouring states. In the post Cold War era, a significant aspect of India's foreign policy is the Look East Policy. During the cold war, India's relations with its South East Asian neighbours were not very strong. After the end of the cold war, the government of India particularly realised the importance of redressing this imbalance in India's foreign policy. Consequently, the Narsimha Rao government in the early nineties of the last century unveiled the look east policy. Initially it focused on renewing political and economic contacts with the countries of East and South-East Asia.

At present, under the Look East Policy, the Government of India is giving special emphasis on the economic development of backward north eastern region of India taking advantage of huge market of ASEAN as well as of the energy resources available in some of the member countries of ASEAN like Burma. Look-east policy was launched in 1992 just after the end of the cold war, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. After the start of liberalisation, it was a very strategic policy decision taken by the government in the foreign policy. To quote Prime Minister Manmohan Singh "it was also a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and India's place in the evolving global economy".

The economy of South East Asia is a virtually untapped market which is up for grabs by major regional economic entities such as India, China, Europe or the USA. India's compatibility with the South East Asian countries with regard to better regional cooperation lies in the fact of its abstinence from exhibiting hegemonistic ambitions, making it more benign towards South East Asia. The camaraderie between India and South-East Asia is clearly visible through the dynamic persuasion of India's Look-East Policy. India and ASEAN reciprocally have embarked upon a number of initiatives for rejuvenating their ties in multiple areas. Frequent tête-à-tête from both the sides promulgates better implementation of the Policy. The improving intensification of economic linkages with ASEAN has inspired India to enter into the second phase of its Look-East Policy. Phase II is the deviation from complete economic issues to the broader agenda involving security cooperation, actively constructing transport corridors and erecting pillars of linkages and connectivity. This phase of India's Look-East Policy renders ample relevance to the development of its North-Eastern Region because of its geographical proximity to South-East Asia. The

North-Eastern tip of India consisting of contiguous seven sister states- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and the state of Sikkim - constitutes a unique narrow passageway connecting the Indian subcontinent to East and South-East Asia and acts as a crucial corridor for human migration between these areas. The North-East region because of its favourable geographic location, cradled by the Himalayas in the north, Bay of Bengal in the south and flanked by 5 Asian countries- Nepal, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh, acts as a gateway to South-East Asia. There are ample possibilities for North-East India to reap benefits from India's thriving relations with South East Asia as the process of globalisation provides the countries with the opportunities to grapple with cross-market accessibility and enabling them alleviate their poverty and economic backwardness.

The ecstatic beauty of India's North-East serves as an attractive tourist spot and its infrastructure is a hub of immense business potential. The term North-East is an ambiguous one leading to portray the image of a single state with homogenous attributes, which is vastly different from the actual standing. On the contrary, the North-East India largely bears the tenets of diversity and distinctness. The North-East India unfortunately is not free from many evils and is often thwarted by gruesome happenings retarding the pace of development. The Look-East Policy is being embarked upon with the presupposition that the improving trade ties between India and ASEAN will certainly elevate the North-East out of the menace of insurgency, poverty and economic backwardness. The Look-East Policy is expected to usher in a new era of development for the North East through network of pipelines, connectivity, communication and trade.

The ASEAN-India car rally of 2003 was a notable initiative undertaken by the Indian Government to emphasise on the geographic proximity between North-East India and South-East Asia. Moreover, India has undertaken some bilateral and multilateral projects for boosting connectivity between the North-East and South East Asia. The important ongoing and potential infrastructure projects in this regard are Moreh-Tamu-Kalewa Road, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Trans Asian Highway, India- Myanmar rail linkages, Kaladan Multimodal project, the Stilwell road, Myanmar-India- Bangladesh gas or oil pipeline, Tamaranthi Hydroelectricity project and optical fiber network between North East India and South East Asia. But certain obstacles like lack of infrastructural development, absence of enthusiastic response from local people, frequent insurgencies, poor governance in the states, the easy availability of arms and weapons from across the international border to be utilised in armed movements and criminal activities impede increased relations

between North-East India and South East Asia. Moreover, the geographic location of the North-Eastern region makes it more vulnerable to be the core of hostility with massive negative outcomes.

There are enough avenues through which North East India can be related to South-East Asia. Racial, linguistic and cultural similarity prevails among the people of North-East India and those of South-East Asia. If the concerned governments really strive to translate their policies into reality their collaborative endeavors would invariably revive age-old cultural and historical bonds. To highlight the linguistic attachment it should be stated that it is an area of extensive linguistic diversity with predominantly three language families represented- Austro-Asiatic, Indo-European and Tibeto- Burman. Austro-Asiatic languages are now spoken by a single group in North-East India (the Khasi) but they are also found in East India and South-East Asia reflecting that they might have been more frequent in North-East in the past. Indo- European language is spoken from Europe to Central and South Asia with their easternmost occurrence in Nepal, Bangladesh and North-East India. Tibeto-Burman languages are a branch of Sino- Tibetan family which is mainly spoken in North-East India, China and South-East Asia. Thus North-East India sets up an important linguistic contact zone.

Through centuries there has been exchange of peoples, goods and services between our North-East and countries of South and South-East Asia. The Ahoms of Assam migrated several centuries ago from the Shan state of Burma where the language spoken is almost identical to that spoken in Laos and Thailand. The Chins from Myanmar migrated over the past centuries to Manipur and Meities of Manipur have ties for over 2000 years with the Burmans of Myanmar. Similar migration has also occurred to North-East from Yunan province of China. Boosting people to people contact transcending political barriers is an imperative for facilitating cultural interaction among various regions. In contemporary era, physical connectivity is of utmost importance as it channelises the means to accelerate the movement of goods, people and services and thereby acts as a gateway to reviving economic enterprise.

Advanced communication and interaction would foster trade, commerce and tourism prospects in the entire North-East region. But because of the existing hurdles the people of North East region are quite apprehensive about the developmental strategies and consider it as mere rhetoric. It will be fatal for India in the long run if its government ever tries to get integrated with South East Asia by using North-East as a channel for its economic progress. The people of the North-East should not feel ostracised from the mainstream one and simultaneously need to be convinced of the genuine

concern of the government about the overall betterment and security of the region.

Thence, it can be asserted that India's North-East Region is a solid domain in orchestrating India's Look-East Policy. The development of the region is a stepping stone towards the success of the policy. For utmost achievement India and ASEAN should be steadily oriented towards their innovative measures with the adequate knowledge of their common interests and gains. India should devote its potential to utilise the available resources in the North-East in their best possible way. The existing opportunities and the challenges are to be assessed and grappled skillfully. North-East India and South-East Asia must grasp the skill of understanding each others' proficiencies, should pay tribute to each others' potential and must reveal greater endurance towards each others' drawbacks. Cooperative endeavors based on mutual trust and confidence will lead to enduring development and proper accomplishment of the Policy.

## II. LOOK EAST POLICY AS INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: RELEVANCE FOR NORTH EAST REGION:

Look East Policy to give a new dimension. The continuous meeting and intermingling of people from diverse social backgrounds helps in crafting a liberal and cosmopolitan attitude to life. India is ideally placed to spur a movement catalyzed. Chowna Mein, Public Health Engineering Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, while addressing the 13th annual Conference of the North East Region Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (NERCPA) remarked that the northeast has a potential to facilitate India's Look East Policy.

Further, Mein pointed out when India launched the Look East Policy in 1991, the thrust was not laid on the geographical proximity between its northeastern region and Southeast Asia. Lack of adequate physical connectivity between the northeast and Southeast Asia is one of the important factors that hindered possibilities of garnering regional economic developments. The country's fourth centre of Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) was opened in Tezpur University,

Tezpur, Assam on Saturday 23rd July, 2011 with a view to initiate quality research and help policy formulation for facilitation of better economic integration of the Northeast with southeast

Asian, East Asian and Far East countries under the 'Look East' policy. Pranab Mukherjee, Union Finance Minister also the chairman of the ISI council, inaugurated the centre at Tezpur university in the presence of Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, Union Minister, for Statistics and Programme Implementation Srikant Jena, Secretary of Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, T.

C. A. Anant, ISI, Director, Bimal K. Roy and ISI Northeast centre head M. Bendre. The former External Minister Mukherjee during his brief interaction with the media said that the success of the Look East Policy in Southeast depends on how quickly can North East with integrate and build land, air, and economic connectivity with SAARC, southeast Asian, East Asian and Far East countries. In this perspective, the Northeast ISI centre will not only help in facilitating education, research and academic activities, but also help in formulation keeping in view the importance of this region under the Look East policy. Adding to that Mukherjee said, the question is how fast we can improve the connectivity. That is why the 12th plan has projected US \$ one trillion investment for infrastructure and connectivity in the country. And 50% of this investment is expected to come from the private sector. He also suggested using various modes of investment based on the nature of these projects. With about 90% of the region's geographical area sharing international borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar, the Look East Policy envisages for the northeast having beneficial trade links with Southeast and South Asian countries. Director General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS), D. Sinha said, the northeast, despite its huge cache of natural resources and international borders with a number of countries, is yet to derive any benefits from the Look East Policy. Every state in the region has a distinct advantage in terms of trade. But, economic indicators reveal that the northeast is still untouched.

### III. RELEVANCE OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY FOR NORTH EAST REGION:

Political, Economic and Security External Affairs Minister of India, S. M. Krishna said on 15th October, 2010, China should keep our (India) sensitivities in mind. That's how relationships are built, sustained and nurtured. Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India a day after meeting his counterpart Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao on 30th October, 2010 said that they had resolved to find *pragmatic and mutually satisfactory* solution to the border problem and remove *misunderstandings* to strengthen ties. Dr Singh further commented, whatever Premier Wen said, I agree. India - China relations should be strengthened. Whatever misunderstandings are there should be removed, he added. National Security Adviser, Shivshankar Menon said on 30th November, 2010 the fourteenth round of boundary negotiations between India and China had made *steady progress* with both sides expressing willingness to arrive at a *fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable* solution. After an agreement for rail connectivity with Bangladesh, China will now get a 250-million dollar loan from the Asian Development Bank to build a new expressway in the western Yunnan Province right till the Myanmar border. The Chinese already have

strategic projects in Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. A direct railroad link to the port city of Chittagong in Bangladesh. China on 15th September, 2011 said it was working with India to set up a new joint consultation and coordination mechanism on boundary affairs and asserted that it was strictly abiding by the agreements reached between the two countries in the past to maintain peace along the border. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu, the new mechanism will handle major border affairs that have a bearing on peace and tranquility in the border areas at a diplomatic level. At present two sides are engaged in depth communication over specific matters such as content of the mechanism and operating methods of it at the working level.

### IV. INDIA- ASEAN RELATION:

The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) comprises of Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam. India's focus on a strengthened and multi-faceted relationship with ASEAN is an outcome of the significant changes in the world's political and economic scenario since the early 1990s and India's own march towards economic liberalisation. India's search for economic space resulted in the 'Look East Policy'. The Look East Policy has today matured into a dynamic and action oriented 'Act East Policy'. PM at the 12th ASEAN India Summit and the 9th East Asia Summit held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, in November, 2014, formally enunciated the Act East Policy. Apart from ASEAN, India has taken other policy initiatives in the region that involve some members of ASEAN like BIMSTEC, MGC etc. India is also an active participant in several regional forums like the Asia-Europe Meeting, East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting + (ADMM+) and Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum. There has been steady progress in the ASEAN-India partnership since the Look East Policy was launched in 1991. India became sectoral dialogue partners in 1992 and full dialogue partners in 1996. Since 2002, India has annual Summits with ASEAN along with China, Japan and Republic of Korea. There are 30 Dialogue Mechanisms cutting across all the sectors including 7 ministerial level meetings.

### V. COMMEMORATIVE SUMMIT:

In 2012, ASEAN and India commemorated 20 years of dialogue partnership and 10 years of Summit level partnership with ASEAN with a Commemorative Summit in New Delhi under the theme 'ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace and Shared Prosperity' on 20-21 December 2012. The Commemorative Summit attended by the Leaders from all the 10 ASEAN countries endorsed elevating the partnership to a 'Strategic Partnership'. The Leaders also adopted the 'ASEAN-India Vision

Statement', which charts the future of ASEAN-India cooperation. Two major events that were organized in 2012 in the run-up to the Commemorative Summit include the 2nd ASEAN-India Car Rally and Shipping Expedition of INS Sudarshini to ASEAN countries. During the Summit, the heads of the Government recommended establishment of ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) to undertake policy research, advocacy and networking activities with organizations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN, with the aim to promote the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership. The AIC has been serving as a resource centre for ASEAN Member States and India since its establishment in 2013, for strengthening ASEAN-India strategic partnership and promoting India-ASEAN dialogue and cooperation in the areas of mutual interests. AIC has provided some very valuable inputs to policy makers in India and ASEAN on implementation of ASEAN-India connectivity by organising seminars, roundtables etc. AIC also organizes workshops, seminars and conferences on various cross-cutting issues relevant to ASEAN-India strategic partnership. It undertakes regular networking activities with relevant public/private agencies, organizations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN and EAS countries, with the aim of providing up-to-date information, data resources and sustained interaction, for promoting ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership.

#### VI. SECURITY COOPERATION:

The main forum for ASEAN security dialogue is the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). India has been attending annual meetings of this forum since 1996 and has actively participated in its various activities. The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) is the highest defence consultative and cooperative mechanism in ASEAN. The ADMM+ brings together Defence Ministers from the 10 ASEAN nations plus Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia, and the United States. Defense Minister attended the 3rd ADMM Plus held from 4-5 November 2015 in Kuala Lumpur. Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) is an avenue for track 1.5 diplomacy focusing on cross cutting maritime issues of common concern. India participated in the 4th EAMF held in Manado, Indonesia on 10-11 September 2015.

#### VII. TRADE AND INVESTMENT

India-ASEAN trade and investment relations have been growing steadily, with ASEAN being India's fourth largest trading partner. The annual trade registered an average growth of 22% per annum in the decade up to 2011-12, but has stagnated thereafter. It stood at approximately US\$ 76.53 billion in 2014-15. Investment flows are also substantial both ways, with ASEAN accounting for approximately 12.5% of investment flows

into India since 2000. FDI inflows into India from ASEAN between April 2007-March 2015 was about US\$ 32.44 billion. Whereas FDI outflows from India to ASEAN countries, from April 2007 to March 2015, as per data maintained by DEA, was about US\$ 38.672 billion. The ASEAN-India Free Trade Area has been completed with the entering into force of the ASEAN-India Agreements on Trade in Service and Investments on 1 July 2015. ASEAN and India have been also working on enhancing private sector engagement. ASEAN India-Business Council (AIBC) was set up in March 2003 in Kuala Lumpur as a forum to bring key private sector players from India and the ASEAN countries on a single platform for business networking and sharing of ideas.

#### VIII. TOURISM

INDIA-ASEAN cooperation in Tourism Sector is conducted through ASEAN-India Tourism Ministers Meeting. The 3<sup>rd</sup> ATM+India meeting in 2012 signed a MoU on Strengthening Tourism Cooperation thereby making India the first Dialogue Partner to sign a MoU on Strengthening Tourism Cooperation with ASEAN. It is envisaged to serve as the key instrument for more action-oriented cooperation, encouraging both parties to cooperate in facilitating travel and tourist visits and further strengthen the close tourism partnership. The functional cooperation in tourism sector included, among others:

- ASEAN Promotional Chapter for Tourism (APCT): It was established and started operations in Mumbai in 2011
- ASEAN-India Car Rally: It was held from 26 November – 21 December 2012. It marked another meaningful step forward in ASEAN-India tourism cooperation and at the same time reflected the existence of land route connectivity that would facilitate tourism exchange between ASEAN and India.
- Visa on arrival facility: It now stands extended to all south-east Asian countries.
- Buddhist Circuit: It has been established to support ASEAN tourists to visit the Buddhists sites in India
- ASEAN were invited as "Guest of Honour" at the International Buddhist Conclave held in Varanasi, India in October, 2016.

#### IX. CONNECTIVITY

ASEAN-India connectivity is a matter of strategic priority for India as also the ASEAN countries. In 2013, India became the third dialogue partner of ASEAN to initiate an ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee-India Meeting. While India has made considerable progress in implementing the India-

Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multimodal Project, issues related to increasing the maritime and air connectivity between ASEAN and India and transforming the corridors of connectivity into economic corridors are under discussion. In this connection, India has recently completed 160 km of the Tamu – Kalewa- Kalembo (TKK) friendship Road as part of the Trilateral Highway from Moreh in India to Mae Sot in Thailand. We are also committed to another 120km in the Kalewa-Yargyi sector and refurbishment of 71 bridges on the TKK Road. Myanmar and Thailand are to complete their respective segments. India is also resolved to begin negotiations on Transit Transport Agreement between India-Myanmar-Thailand for the Trilateral Highway. India is undertaking the Kaladam Multimodal Project in Myanmar, including the port at Sittwe towards completion. There are possibilities for collaboration in terms of SEZs at Kyaukpyu and Dawei.

A possible extension to India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam is also under consideration. A consensus on signing and operationalizing the India-Myanmar-Thailand Motor Vehicle Agreement (IMT MVA) has been reached. This agreement will have a critical role in realizing seamless movement of passenger, personal and cargo vehicles along roads linking India, Myanmar and Thailand. PM announced a Line of Credit of US\$ 1 billion to promote projects that support physical and digital connectivity between India and ASEAN and a Project Development Fund with a corpus of INR 500 Crores to develop manufacturing hubs in CLMV countries.

#### X. FUNDS:

ASEAN Multilateral Division offers project-based financial assistance to ASEAN countries. Financial assistance has been provided to ASEAN countries in following forms:

- ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund: At the 7th ASEAN-India Summit in 2009, India announced a contribution of US\$ 50 million to the ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund, to support implementation of the ASEAN-India Plan of Action 2010-15. Till now 13 projects have been implemented, 17 projects are under implementation and 22 projects are in the planning stage. Projects and programmes worth US\$ 35.68 million are under implementation, including the largest project under the ASEAN-India Cooperation, i.e., Space Project.
- ASEAN-India S&T Development Fund (AISTDF): At the 6th ASEAN-India Summit in November 2007 in Singapore, PM announced

the setting up of an ASEAN-India Science & Technology Development Fund with a US\$ 1 million contribution from India to promote joint collaborative R&D research projects in Science & Technology sectors. An amount of US\$ 373,352 has already been spent out of this Fund on various projects & activities. We have enhanced the ASEAN-India Science and Technology Fund from US\$ 1 million to US\$ 5 million w.e.f. 2016.

- ASEAN-India Green Fund: At the 6th ASEAN-India Summit on 21 November 2007 in Singapore, PM announced the setting up of an ASEAN-India Green Fund with an initial contribution of US\$ 5 million from India to support collaboration activities relating to environment and climate change. Till July 2015, Projects worth US\$ 2,079,287 covered under this Fund are at the implementation stage.

#### XI. ASEAN-INDIA PROJECTS

India has been cooperating with ASEAN by way of implementation of various projects in the fields of Agriculture, Science & Technology, Space, Environment & Climate Change, Human Resource Development, Capacity Building, New and Renewable Energy, Tourism, People-to-People contacts and Connectivity etc. Since 2011-12, while 13 projects have been completed, 17 projects are under implementation and 22 projects are in the planning stage, some of which are in the final stages of approval. Programmes and projects totaling over US\$ 48.85 million have been proposed since September 2011 till date to ASEAN through the ASEAN Secretariat. Some of the prominent projects, which are either ongoing or in the final stages of approval are as follows: Space Project envisaging establishment of a Tracking, Data Reception/Data Processing Station in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and upgradation of Telemetry Tracking and Command Station in Biak, Indonesia; Setting up of Centres of Excellence in Software Development & Training in CLMV countries are some of the major projects under implementation.

Apart from the above projects, India has been supporting ASEAN specially CLMV countries under the Initiatives for ASEAN Integration, which include projects on Training of English Language for Law Enforcement Officers in CLMV countries and Training of professionals dealing with capital markets in CLMV by National Institute of Securities Management Mumbai. To boost People-to-people Interaction with ASEAN, India has been organising various programme including Training Programme for ASEAN diplomats, Exchange of



Parliamentarians, Participation of ASEAN students in the National Children's Science Congress, ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks, ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Lecture Series etc. In the field of agriculture, India and ASEAN have projects such as Exchange of Farmers, ASEAN-India Fellowships for Higher Agricultural Education in India and ASEAN, Exchange of Agriculture Scientists, Empowerment of ASEAN-Indian Women through Cooperatives etc. In the S&T field, there are projects such as ASEAN-India Collaborative Project on S&T for Combating Malaria, ASEAN-India Programme on Quality Systems in Manufacturing, ASEAN-India Collaborative R&D Project on Mariculture, Bio-mining and Bioremediation Technologies etc.

## XII. PLANS OF ACTION

As a reflection of the interest of ASEAN and India to intensify their engagement, the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity, which sets out the roadmap for long-term ASEAN-India engagement, was signed at the 3rd ASEAN-India Summit in 2004 in Vientiane. A Plan of Action (POA) for the period 2004-2010 was also developed to implement the Partnership. Most of the paras of the 2nd POA (2010-15) have been implemented. The 3rd POA (2016-20) was adopted by the ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers Meeting held in August 2015. ASEAN and India have finalized a list of priority areas for the period of 2016-2018, which would contribute towards successful implementation of the 2016-2020 Plan of Action. 54 out of 130 activities identified in the 3rd Plan of Action have been already implemented.

## XIII. DELHI DIALOGUE

India has an annual Track 1.5 event Delhi Dialogue, for discussing politico-security and economic issues between ASEAN and India. Since 2009, India has had eight editions of this event. The 8th edition of Delhi Dialogue is being hosted by the MEA in partnership with IDSA, FICCI and other select Indian and ASEAN partners on 17-19 February 2016 in New Delhi. DD VIII has 'ASEAN-India Relations: A New Paradigm' as its theme and includes an Inaugural Business Session, a Ministerial Session, and an Academic Session.

Finally, India is today the fastest growing emerging economy in the world and can become an engine of growth for all our neighbours. We are in a position to offer a significant stake to our neighbours in India's own prosperity and growth by opening up our markets to them and increasing our investment in their economic growth. It is inevitable that there will be a growing impact on Indian states which shares borders with these neighbours. Our Border States will have an opportunity to benefit

from the growing economic and commercial exchanges with our neighbouring countries provided appropriate policies are adopted. Nowhere is this more relevant than in India's North Eastern Region which shares the borders with 5 of our neighbours, namely China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

This is particularly necessary when we assess the ambitious agenda of ASEAN and India connectivity as the external Affairs Minister emphasised the impotence of the "c" of connectivity to five Ts that the Government of India pursuing –Tradition, Talent, Tourism, Trade and Technology. This is most important to note that the neighbouring counties of India should be looked upon as a major asset in India's efforts to create a peaceful, stable and prosperous neighborhood. Here the connectivity implies more than geographic linkages between us. It involves also institution-to-institution and people-to-people linkages. Even geographic connectivity becomes stronger concept if we include a multimodal approach that integrates land, sea and air connectivity, bring in the soft infrastructure to advance trade and facilitation through joint transit arrangements, and allow easier movement of goods and people. The main focus of this roundtable was on "ASEAN-India: Integration and Development" in the context of connectivity, its soft infrastructure, economic, trade and investment cooperation and integration of the economic space defined by ASEAN and India. It places a special focus on the land bridge provided by Myanmar for India's connectivity to ASEAN.

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