

A STUDY OF INDIA'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION WITH ASEAN COUNTRIES

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The Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok by the five original Member countries, namely, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined it on 8 January 1984, Vietnam on 28 July 1995, Laos and Myanmar on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia on 30 April 1999.

The ASEAN Declaration states that the aims and purposes of the Association are :

- to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavors in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian nations, and
- to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.

In addition to trade and investment liberalization, regional economic integration is being pursued through the development of Trans-ASEAN transportation network consisting of major inter-state highway and railway networks, principal ports and sea lanes for maritime traffic, inland waterway transport, and major civil aviation links. ASEAN is promoting the interoperability and interconnectivity of the national telecommunications equipment and services. Building of trans-ASEAN energy networks, which consist of the ASEAN power Grid and the Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline Projects are also being developed.

Today, ASEAN economic cooperation covers such areas as trade, investment, industry, services, finance, agriculture, forestry, energy, transportation and communication, intellectual property, small and medium enterprises, and tourism.

Current ASEAN - India Relationship

ASEAN and India have agreed to improve transport and infrastructure links to facilitate trade and investment flows as well as tourism between the two sides. Cooperation in IT, HRD, SMEs, transport and infrastructure, S&T, fighting

transnational crime and people-to-people contact have been identified as areas for further cooperation. Moreover, cooperation in the technologically based areas of

advance materials, space technology, biotechnology and food security will be pursued.

India has expressed interest in helping develop the Mekong Basin Sub-region and in areas such as fisheries, water management and resources development, reservoir sedimentation and oceanographic studies, environment impact assessment, bio-diversity enumeration, soil resources study, medicinal plants and aromatics, rice based agriculture, study of cultivation of other crops, road and railway development and project management.

Both in political and economic terms ASEAN has gained international recognition. It is now actively engaged in regular dialogues with the major economic partners, the US, Japan, European Economic Community, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It is also actively seeking for a political and peaceful solution to the Indochina conflict. ASEAN's initiatives in this regard received unanimous support from the majority of nations in the UN, essentially because ASEAN was able to develop a common stand.

The future of ASEAN lies in the field of economic cooperation. A large ASEAN bureaucracy alone can not deal with the challenges in the future. Initiatives by the private sector, such as the ASEAN-CCI (Chamber of Commerce of Commerce and Industry) or the ASEAN-us Business Council, promise to bring fruitful results.

The cooperation of South -East Asian countries and India has favourable prospects of development. This is guaranteed by the common position shared by the countries of this region and India in regard to vital international issues, their mutual interest in strengthening and expanding their economic ties and friendship which has become traditional. South-East Asian countries and India's friendship is growing stronger from year to year, and there is no doubt that the future will be marked by new steps made in this direction which so far are to the greatest benefit for the people of these countries and for the cause of universal peace.

India and the countries of South-East Asian region and other developing countries are seriously trying to attain a durable world peace because only through peace will these countries be able to carry on their national development and raise the living standards of their peoples. Consequently it is desire of South-East Asia Zone of peace, freedom and neutrality. Any military rivalry or arms race in the Indian Ocean will create instability in the region. That is why India along with the a South -East Asian countries hopes that Indian Ocean will become a zone of peace.