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INSIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



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We are pleased to present the final number (November-December) of *Insight Southeast Asia* for 2012. As the year drew to a close, the spotlight gradually shifted from Southeast Asia to India. New Delhi hosted the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit on December 20-21 2012 marking an important milestone in India's dialogue and summit relationship with ASEAN. It led to the adoption of the Vision Statement which charts out the path ahead for India and ASEAN. The relationship was also raised to the level of strategic partnership and a conclusion of negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement in Services and Investment. India's Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh flagged down, in New Delhi on December 21, the ASEAN-India Car rally which covered a distance of 8,000 km through eight countries in 22 days. Elsewhere in Manila, the Indian Navy's INS Sudarshini continued its six-month long expedition touching nine ASEAN countries.

The ten ASEAN States and their six regional partners (Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea) agreed to begin negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The RCEP would cover a population of some 3 billion people and combined GDP of over \$19 trillion amounting to a third of global economic output and half of the global market.

China's march to infrastructural integration with the neighbouring LMCV countries continued unabated. While a 121 km long road was inaugurated in Cambodia recently, an agreement to build a railway by 2018 (financed by China) connecting Thailand-Vietnam-Laos and China, was also recently signed. Besides, Laos has also begun building a hydroelectricity dam on the Mekong. It also joins the WTO in 2013. On its part, India continued to build relations with Myanmar under the rapidly developing circumstances with a visit by Aung San Suu Kyi to India and an invitation by President Thein Sein to invest in Myanmar. India and Vietnam raised their trade target to \$7 billion by 2015. India is also scheduled to sign FTAs with Thailand and New Zealand respectively in the new year and is slated to increase its trade with Australia.

Udai Bhanu Singh



Source: www.aseanindia.com

SINGAPORE

Area: 714 sq km

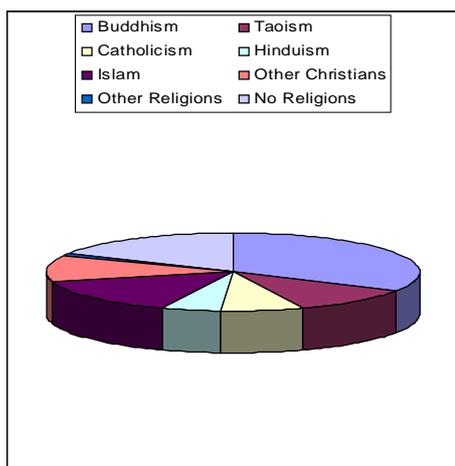
Capital City: Singapore

System of Government: Republic and Parliamentary Democracy

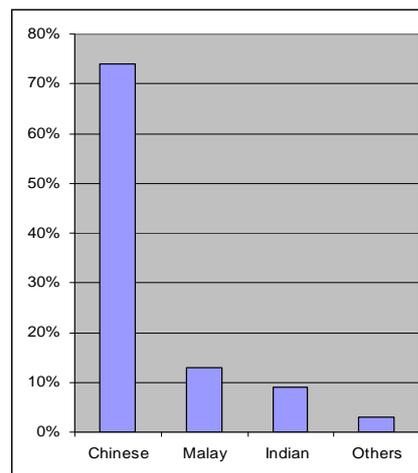
Head of the State and Government: President Tony Tan Keng Yam

Estimated Resident Population (2011 Estimate): 5.18000000

Religious Composition in Percentage¹



Ethnic Composition in Percentage²



Currency: Singapore Dollar

GDP (2012 Estimate): \$267.9 billion

GDP Growth Rate (2012 Estimate): 2.1%

Inflation (2012 Estimate): 4.5%

Unemployment (2011 Estimate): 2%

GDP Per Capita (2012 Estimate): \$49,936

Military Expenditure (2011): \$8,302 million

Border Disputes: Maritime boundaries yet to be delimited in Johor and Singapore Straits; finalization of the 1973 agreement with Indonesia concerning areas around Northern Indonesia's Bantam Island pending.

Part of the Following International Organizations and Treaties: United Nations, International Atomic Energy Agency, Organization for the Prohibition

of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization Preparatory Commission, Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), CTBT, PTBT, IAEA Safeguard Agreement, IAEA Additional Protocol, Nuclear Safety Convention, Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty, Chemical Weapons Convention, Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), Geneva Protocol, Hague Code of Conduct against

¹ "Singapore Today", *Foreign and Common Wealth Office*, Last Updated on: 07 December 2012, Available at <<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/country-profile/asia-oceania/singapore/?profile=today>>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

² Ibid.

Ballistic Missile Proliferation, Proliferation Security Initiative.³

Singapore – India Relations: The two nations share close bilateral relations and are integral to each others economies. Singapore besides being economically important to India has also played a key role in connecting the country with other Southeast Asian neighbours. The two in addition to sharing political and economic interests also share similar concerns with reference to terrorism and religious extremism and have therefore developed a broad mutually beneficial framework of security.⁴

Sources:

"India-Singapore Relations", *ASEANIndia.com*, February 2012, Available at <http://www.aseanindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Singapore-February-2012.pdf>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

"Singapore Treaty Memberships", *NTI*, 25 May 2012, Available at http://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/singapore_1.pdf?_=1340222312, Accessed on: 28 December 2012

"Singapore Country Fact Sheet", *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, Australian Government, Undated, Available at <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/fs/sing.pdf>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

"Singapore Capital", *Maps of the World*, Undated, Available at <http://www.mapsofworld.com/singapore/capital.html>, accessed on: 28 December 2012.

"Singapore Today", *Foreign and Common Wealth Office*, Last Updated on: 07 December 2012, Available at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/country-profile/asia-oceania/singapore/?profile=today>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

"The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database", *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, Undated, Available at <http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

"The World Fact Book", *Central Intelligence Agency*, Last Updated: December 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sn.html>, Accessed on: 18 December 2012

³ "Singapore Treaty Memberships", *NTI*, 25 May 2012, Available at http://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/singapore_1.pdf?_=1340222312, Accessed on: 28 December 2012

⁴ "India-Singapore Relations", *ASEANIndia.com*, February 2012, Available at <http://www.aseanindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Singapore-February-2012.pdf>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

THAILAND

Area: 513,115 sq km

Capital City: Bangkok

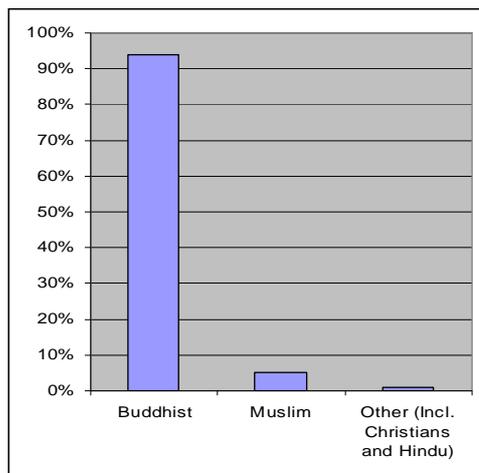
System of Government: Constitutional Monarchy

Head of the State: King Bhumibol Adulyadej
Yingluck

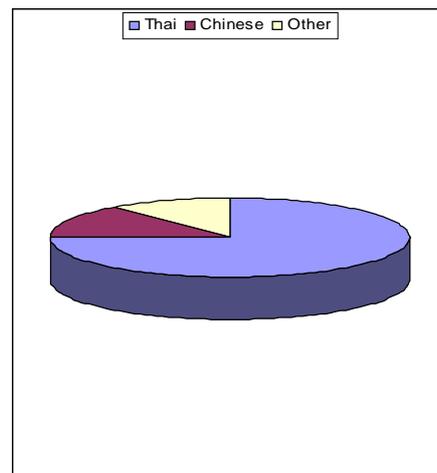
Head of Government: Prime Minister
Shinawatra

Estimated Resident Population (2011 Estimate): 64,076,033

Religious Composition in Percentage¹



Ethnic Composition in Percentage²



Currency:

BahtGDP (2012 Estimate): \$377 billion

GDP Growth Rate (2012 Estimate): 5.6%

Inflation (2012 Estimate): 3.2%

Unemployment (2011 Estimate): 0.7%

GDP Per Capita (2012 Estimate): \$5,848

Military Expenditure (2011): \$5, 114 million

Border Disputes: Disputes continue with Laos over several islands in the Mekong River; ongoing dispute with Cambodia over the Preah Vihear Temple ruins.

Nations (UN), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Group of 77 at UN (G77), Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), World Trade Organization (WTO), UN Human Rights

Part of the Following International Organizations and Treaties: United

¹ "Thailand Today", *Foreign and Common Wealth Office*, Last Updated: 24 September 2012, Available at <<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/country-profile/asia-oceania/thailand>>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012

² "The World Fact Book", *Central Intelligence Agency*, Last Updated: December 2012, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/th.html>>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012

Council (UNHCR), BIMSTEC, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE).³

Singapore – India Relations: India and Thailand share ancient civilizational links. This has resulted a large Indian Diaspora residing in Thailand. India's 'Look East' policy has been complimented by Thailand's 'Look West' Policy has led to the development of close relations between the countries. HRH Princess Mahachakri Sirindhorn, has been a recipient of India Gandhi Prize for Peace, Development and Disarmament 2004. Along with visit of the Thai Royal Family, ministerial level visits between the countries are frequent. There have been six Prime Ministerial visits from Thailand to India and four Prime Ministerial visits from India to Thailand in the last decade alone. The past four years have seen an increase in economic and commercial partnership between the countries. The two nations have been working on increasing cooperation in the Defence sector as well⁴

Sources:

"India-Thailand Relations", *ASEANIndia.com*, February 2012, Available at < <http://www.aseanindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Thailand-February-2012.pdf> >, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

"Thailand: General Information", *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, Australian Government, Last Updated: 24 September 2012, Available at <<http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/fs/thai.pdf>>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

"Thailand Today", *Foreign and Common Wealth Office*, Last Updated: 24 September 2012, Available at <<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/country-profile/asia-oceania/thailand>>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012

"The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database", *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, Undated, Available at <<http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4>>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

"The World Fact Book", *Central Intelligence Agency*, Last Updated: December 2012, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/th.html>>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

³ "Thailand Today", *Foreign and Common Wealth Office*, Last Updated: 24 September 2012, Available at <<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/country-profile/asia-oceania/thailand>>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012

⁴ "India-Thailand Relations", *ASEANIndia.com*, February 2012, Available at < <http://www.aseanindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Thailand-February-2012.pdf> >, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

ASEAN

Myanmar Rejects ASEAN's Talks Offer

Myanmar has rejected ASEAN's offer to open talks focused on the communal violence that the Western Rakhine state has been experiencing. SURIN Pitsuwan, ASEAN's Secretary General had offered to set up talks between ASEAN, the UN and Myanmar's government in order to prevent the violence having a regional impact. Fighting in Rakhine had resulted in the death of 88 persons in November and nearly 10,000 have been displaced. However, rights groups fear that the number could be much higher.¹

Talks on Regional FTA begun during 21st ASEAN Summit

At the 21st ASEAN Summit held on November 18, 2012 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the 'Guiding Principles and Objectives for Negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership', adopted by ASEAN's Economic Ministers in Siem Reap in August 2012 was endorsed. This marks the beginning of talks on the new regional trade treaty, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Negotiations on the

RCEP will begin in 2013 between ASEAN's ten member nations and its current six free trade agreement (FTA) partners - Australia, New Zealand, China, India, South Korea and Japan.²

Manila Meeting Postponed

The proposed Manila Meeting that was to be held on December 12, 2012 between the four ASEAN claimants to the South China Sea has been postponed citing "scheduling problems". Raul Hernandez, spokesperson for the Department of Foreign Affairs said that the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei will be having a meeting on finding options for tackling the South China Sea issue at a later date. He told the press that the four parties were working on it and the challenge here was the schedule of those attending.³

ASEAN Secretary Foresees Naval Clashes

ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan over the weekend warned that China's new policy of boarding and searching ships entering disputed territories in the region could spark naval clashes. He said that anxiety level has increased amongst all parties that would need access, passage and freedom to travel through the waters. Director General of the foreign affairs office of Hainan Province, Wu Shicun has said that Chinese ships would be allowed to search and repel only those ships that are engaged in

¹ "Myanmar Government Rejects ASEAN Talks Offer", *The Daily Star*, 01 November 2012, Available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=255728?>>, Accessed on: 10 November 2012.

² Mary Swire, "ASEAN Plus 6 FTA Partners Launch Trade talks", *Tax News*, 23 November 2012, Available at http://www.tax-news.com/news/ASEAN_Plus_6_FTA_Partners_Launch_Trade_Talks_58397.html?>, Accessed on: 10 November 2012.

³ "Manila Meeting Among 4 ASEAN West PHL Sea Claimants Postponed – DFA", *GMA News*, 07 December 2012, Available at <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/285473/news/nation/manila-meeting-among-4-asean-west-phl-sea-claimants-postponed-mdash-dfa?>>, Accessed on: 18 December 2012.

illegal activities and are within 12 nm zone surrounding islands that are claimed by China.

However, he has not defined what constitutes “illegal activities”. Philippines President Benigno Aquino III has said that China’s new policy would force Philippine to lodge a diplomatic protest and could accelerate the filing of a formal claim before the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea. He further stated that such an action by China would be a gross violation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.⁴

ASEAN Meeting Held to Address Violence against Women

A three day workshop was held in Manila to address the phenomenon of growing violence against women in ASEAN countries. The Training Workshop on Strengthening Capacities of Communities, Practitioners and Policy Makers to Address Violence against Women (VAW) identified common approaches that practitioners and service providers could use to address violence against women in the Asian region. Social workers, law enforcement officers and non-governmental organizations involved in managing cases of victims or survivors of violence from all the ten ASEAN member nations participated in the workshop.

Philippines Social Welfare Secretary Corazon Soliman said that the workshop has served as a venue for “participating countries to share their initiatives, strategies, gains, challenges, and recommendations on strengthening capacities of communities, practitioners and policy makers in addressing VAW focusing on victims-survivors, perpetrators, and enabling mechanisms”.⁵

India - ASEAN

India-ASEAN FTA in Services Finalized

India-ASEAN on December 20, 2012 finalized the FTA in Services and Investment just before the commemoration of the two decade long ties between India and ASEAN. In addition to this, the relationship between the two was re-defined when leaders of all the countries involved elevated the status to ‘strategic partnership’ and promising to add more ‘politico-security’ content to it. Keeping in line with the newly elevated relationship, India and the Southeast Asian nations also agreed to strengthen cooperation in maritime security to ensure freedom of navigation and safety of the Sea Lanes of Communication. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during the plenary session of the summit said “This (elevation of India-ASEAN ties to a strategic partnership is a historic step, and together with the conclusion of the negotiations on FTA in Services and Investments, defines a qualitatively new paradigm of our partnership. The need to

⁴ Joyce Pangco Panares , “ASEAN Exec Sees Naval Clashes over Sea Claims”, *Manila Standard Today*, 03 December 2012, Available at <http://manilastandardtoday.com/2012/12/03/asean-exec-sees-naval-clashes-over-sea-claims/> , Accessed on: 17 December 2012.

⁵ “ASEAN Meeting Addressing Violence against Women Held in Manila”, *Global Times*, 27 November 2012, Available at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/746719.shtml> , Accessed on: 17 December 2012.

deepen links between people of India and ASEAN member countries, improve connectivity, enhance economic cooperation and cooperation between institutions was also highlighted during the conference.⁶

IIIT-A Plays Host to ASEAN, SAARC Students

Students and researchers from ASEAN, SAARC and African countries participated for the first time in the fifth annual Science Conclave that opened with the inauguration of Indian Institute of Information Technology – Allahabad on December 08, 2012. The conclave featured students from Jammu and Kashmir and the North-Eastern states, who were participating for the very first time in addition to five Nobel laureates.⁷ The Science Conclave is inspiration by the Lindau Conclave of Germany. IIIT-A director Dr M D Tiwari said that “the conclave marks the collaboration of Nobel laureates, eminent scientists, executives and students for the promotion of science — an occasion that, he says, is not just rare but memorable”.⁸

India-ASEAN Trade Conclave Held in Guwahati

On December 17, 2012 Union Commerce

Minister Anand Sharma and senior representatives and ambassadors from all 10 South East Asian countries were in Guwahati for the India-ASEAN Trade Conclave held to mark the end of the 8,000 km long India-ASEAN car rally. The conclave focused on boosting, development business and cultural interaction between the two sides. In addition to Union Minister Sharma, the ten Indian Ambassadors to all the ASEAN member countries, Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, Commerce and Industry ministers of several ASEAN nations along with business delegations from all the South East Asian nations were also expected to attend the meeting.⁹

Brunei

US-Brunei Naval Exercise a Success

On November 6, 2012, more than 300 hundred sailors from the US Pacific Fleet and the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) held their annual bilateral naval exercise commonly known as “Cooperation Afloat, Readiness and Training” or CARAT. The exercise was a two day long affair and was officiated at the Muara Naval Base in Brunei. Training was given in providing support for UN peacekeeping missions, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and offshore security. Additionally, there were training exchanges made up of a symposia and classroom instruction in order to share best practices.

⁶ Anirban Bhaumik, “India, ASEAN Finalize FTA in Service”, *the Deccan Herald*, 20 December 2012, Available at < <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/299777/india-asean-finalise-fta-services.html>>, Accessed on: 27 December 2012.

⁷ “IIT-A Conclave to Host ASEAN< SAARC Students”, *The Indian Express*, 07 december 2012, available at < <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/iiita-conclave-to-host-asean-saarc-students/1041681>>, Accessed on: 27 December 2012.

⁸ “ASEAN, SAARC Students Participate in IIT-A’s Fifth Science Conclave”, *HTCampus*, 10 December 2012, Available at < <http://www.htcampus.com/article/asean-saarc-students-participate-iiit-s-fifth-science-conclave-2550/>>, Accessed on: 27 December 2012.

⁹ “City to Host ASEAN-India Trade Conclave”, *Business Standard*, 12 December 2012, Available at < <http://www.business-standard.com/generalnews/news/city-to-host-asean-india-trade-conclave/92606/>>, Accessed on: 27 December 2012.

The two navies also held training in Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOUT) and twenty-four hour sea phase that included maritime security scenarios, a gunnery exercise and shipboard helicopter operations.¹⁰

Brunei, Vietnam Set-Up Bilateral Business Councils

Brunei Darussalam's National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCIBD) and Vietnam's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) signed a cooperation agreement on 29th November 2012, to set up bilateral business councils in Brunei and Vietnam respectively. The councils will allow the business community in both countries, especially the small and medium enterprises to establish contact with each other more easily. According to the agreement both nations will carry out regular exchange of information on foreign trade, production and export opportunities of their respective companies, market and stocks; and on economic and commercial legislation that is promulgated and applicable under their jurisdictions.¹¹

Brunei Receives Spate of Official Visits

Myanmar's President Thein Sein visited Brunei Darussalam from 03 December to 06 December 2012 on Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah's invitation. He was welcomed by Brunei Foreign Affairs Minister Prince Mohammad Bolkiah. Accompanying the president on his trip to Brunei were several senior ministers, representatives of the Lower House and Upper House and a high-ranking Burma Army officer.¹² During his visit, President Thein Sein paid visits to Brunei LNG Sdn Bhd (BLNG) Plant and the Brunei Methanol Company (BMC) Sdn Bhd Plant in Lumut, Belait District and Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) and Rajah Isteri Pengiran Anak Saleha Hospital.^{13,14} The two nations have identified education, healthcare and energy as sectors with for potential cooperation.¹⁵

Very shortly after President Thein Sein's visit, Mr. Hugo Swire, the newly appointed Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, United Kingdom arrived in Brunei to pay a visit to the Sultan. He appreciated the Brunei-UK friendship that was still "going strong". During his visit, MP Swire met with Brunei's Deputy Minister of Defence Dato Paduka Awg

¹⁰ Rabiatal Kamit, "Joint US-Brunei Naval Exercises Begins", *The Brunei Times*, 06 November 2012, available at <http://www.bt.com.bn/news-national/2012/11/06/joint-us-brunei-naval-exercise-begins>>, Accessed on: 10 November 2012.

¹¹ Fitri Shahminan, "Brunei, Vietnam Set up Bilateral Business Councils", *The Brunei Times*, 29 November 2012, Available at < <http://www.bt.com.bn/business-national/2012/11/29/brunei-vietnam-set-bilateral-business-councils>>, Accessed on: 20 December 2012.

¹² "Burmese president Visits Brunei", *The Irrawaddy*, 04 December 2012, Available at < <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/20480>>, Accessed on: 20 December 2012.

¹³ Danial Norjidi, "Myanmar's President Visits Brunei LNG, BMC in Lumut", *BruDirect.com*, 06 December 2012, Available at < <http://www.bruirect.com/index.php/Local-News/myanmar-president-visits-brunei-lng-bmc-in-lumut.html>>, Accessed on: 20 December 2012.

¹⁴ Sally Piri, "Thein Sein Tours UBD", *The Brunei Times*, 05 December 2012, Available at < <http://www.bt.com.bn/news-national/2012/12/05/thein-sein-tours-ubd>>, Accessed on: 20 December 2012.

¹⁵ Quratul-Ain Bandial, "Brunei, Myanmar Identify Areas of Cooperation", *The Brunei Times*, 06 december 2012, Available at < <http://www.asianewsnet.net/home/news.php?id=39858&sec=1>>, Accessed on: 20 December 2012.

Hj Mustappa bin Hj Sirat and discussed the benefits that the local defence programme could gain from the Gurkhas that are governed by the UK and already based in Brunei. He also spoke of conducting joint training and exercises with Brunei's indigenous army. The MP further spoke about UK's willingness to provide Brunei with efficient military fire power at competitive prices.¹⁶

Cambodia

Cambodians Worried Over Draft of Cyber Law

Cambodian government decision to draft a law to govern cyberspace in Cambodia has the Cambodian population worried about online suppression. Approximately 200 bloggers and technology experts from fifteen different countries met at a five day conference in Siem Reap to discuss and debate over the issue. Cambodian officials have stated that the law will solely be used to protect digital information and institutions and not to curb dissent. Freedom advocated, however are unsure. The National Information and Communications Technology Development Authority (Nida), the Council of Ministers, the National Bank of Cambodia, and the ministries of Commerce and Telecommunications are

all involved in the drafting of the law. The number of internet users in Cambodia has jumped from 320,000 in 2011 to 1.68 million this year.¹⁷

Cambodia Inaugurates China Funded 121 km Road

On December 6, 2012, China-funded national road No. 78 was inaugurated in the Northeastern provinces of Cambodia. The 121 km road stretches from Ratanakiri province to Stung Treng province and has been built under a \$73.3 million soft loan provided by the Chinese government. It is expected to contribute the developing economy and for poverty reduction. The inauguration ceremony was presided over by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Chinese Ambassador to Cambodia Pan Guangxue. Hun Sen said the northeastern provinces are situated in the country's fourth economic pole.¹⁸

Obama – Hun Sen have a Tense Meeting

United States President Barack Obama on Monday, 19 November 2012 became the first American leader to visit Cambodia. Obama hopes to motivate Cambodia to follow Myanmar's path. U.S. officials said that Obama had urged Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen to release political prisoners, stop land seizures and hold fair and free elections. U.S. aides acknowledged that the meeting had been tense. After the meeting, both the Cambodian and U.S.

¹⁶ "UK Minister Lauds Brunei's Ties", *The Borneo Post*, 11 December 2012, Available at < <http://www.theborneopost.com/2012/12/11/uk-minister-lauds-brunei-ties/>>, Accessed on: 20 December 2012.

¹⁷ Thera Khoun, "Internet Users Fear Online Suppression with Draft of Cyber Law", *Voice of America*, 01 December 2012, Available at <http://www.voacambodia.com/content/internet-users-fear-online-suppression-with-draft-of-cyber-law/1556142.html>>, Accessed on: 10 December 2012.

¹⁸ "Cambodia Inaugurates China-Funded 121 – km road in Northeast", *Global Times*, 12 December 2012, Available at <<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/748620.shtml>>, Accessed on: 10 December 2012.

leaders did not speak to the press.¹⁹

Cambodia-Thailand to Draw a Mine Clearance Plan

Cambodia and Thailand have agreed to prepare a joint mine clearance plan to demine the area in the Provisional Demilitarized Zone (PDZ) around the Preah Vihear Temple by February 2013. Gen. Neang Phat, Secretary of State at Cambodia's Defense Ministry, and Gen. Worapong Sanganetra, chief of joint staff at the Royal Thai Army co-chaired the third meeting of Cambodia-Thailand Joint Working Group, where the agreement was drawn up. The area is being de-mined to support troop re-deployment in the area and also to comply with the orders of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). ICJ has ordered ceasefire in the area after clashes between the two sides in February and April 2011. ASEAN observers i.e. Indonesians will be given access to the site to monitor the ceasefire.²⁰

Indonesia

Historic Australia-Indonesia-Timor Meeting

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard has claimed a first in regional diplomacy,

after having secured a joint meeting between the leader of Indonesia and East Timor. Leaders of the three countries met together for the first time in more than ten years during the Bali Democracy Forum held on 8-9th November, 2012. Discussions between Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Timor Leste Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao were mainly focused on connectivity, while issues of economic opportunities, cooperation in infrastructure and combating people smuggling were discussed between all three nations.²¹

India-Indonesia Engagement in Private Sector gets Stronger

Indian and Indonesia entrepreneurs have pledged to boost cooperation at Manado Business Conference held in Manado on November 14, 2012. The conference was a part of seminars organized in Indonesia by the Indian embassy to commemorate the 20th anniversary of India-ASEAN partnership. The conference in Manado also coincided with the arrival of INS Sudarshini that is on a historic voyage to nine countries in Southeast Asia.²²

Two major India-Indonesia deals were chalked out in the month of November as well. Hyderabad-based GVK Power and Infrastructure Limited on November 08, 2012 signed an operations and management contract with the Indonesian government airport

¹⁹ "Obama Visits Cambodia", *philly.com*, 20 November 2012, Available at < http://articles.philly.com/2012-11-20/news/35229055_1_cambodian-leader-president-obama-hun-sen>, Accessed on: 20 December 2012.

²⁰ "Cambodia, Thailand Agree to Draw up Mine Clearance Plan Demilitarized Zone By February", *ShanghaiDaily.com*, 19 December 2012, Available at < http://www.shanghaidaily.com/article/article_xinhua.asp?id=114530>, Accessed on: 20 December 2012.

²¹ George Roberts, "Gillard Holds Historic Indonesia-Timor Meeting", *ABC News*, 9 November 2012, Available at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-11-09/gillard-meets-indonesian-president/4363958>>, Accessed on: 11 November 2012.

²² "Indian, Indonesian Entrepreneurs Explore Joint Opportunities", *daijiworld.com*, 14 November 2012, Available at http://www.daijiworld.com/news/news_disp.asp?n_id=155431>, Accessed on: 11 December 2012.

operator, the Airports Authority of Indonesia (Angkasa Pura Airports). The contract includes managing non-aeronautical commercial operations at the two existing terminals and at the new international terminal of Indonesia's second busiest Bali (Denpasar) international airport that is expected to be completed in 2013.²³ India's largest power generator Tata powers has bought 26 percent stake in the Indonesian coal mine PT Baramulti Sukses Sarana Tbk (BSSR) in order to secure its upcoming power plants. Although Tata Powers have not disclosed the deal size, the deal is estimated at around INR 750 crore.²⁴

Afghanistan – Indonesia Strengthen Ties

Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in a bid to strengthen relations between their nations signed agreements related to political, cultural and trade cooperation on 09 November 2012 during the 5th Bali Democracy Forum. The two countries have agreed to visa exemption for diplomatic and service passport holders along with those on bilateral consultations and cultural exchange programs. Both Presidents have said that

the bilateral meeting was fruitful. President Karzai has further appreciated Indonesia's efforts as "the biggest Muslim country to promote democracy".²⁵

Indonesia Enters Race for WTO Leadership

Indonesia has entered the race to lead the World Trade Organization by nominating its former trade minister Mari Pangestu to succeed Pascal Lamy in 2013. Mari is the third candidate to be nominated following Ghana's Alan Kyerematen and Costa Rica's Anabel Gonzalez. Indonesia's move has finally brought the second woman and the third continent into the contest. All directors in WTO's seventeen years of history have been male. Mari's nomination is likely to take many by surprise since her name was not counted amongst those likely to battle in Geneva.²⁶

Laos

Laos to Build Rail to Connect to China, Vietnam and Thailand

Laos has signed an agreement to build a railway connecting to Thailand, Vietnam and China. The total combined cost of the venture is a whopping US\$12 billion. The contract building a railway from Savannakhet on Lao's southwestern border with Thailand to Lao Bao, which is

²³ K Rajni Kanth, "GVK Inks Pact with Indonesian Authority", *Business Standard*, 08 November 2012, Available at <http://business-standard.com/india/news/gvk-inks-pactindonesian-airports-authority/195086/on>>, Accessed on: 11 November 2012.

²⁴ "Tata Power buys 26% in Indonesian Coal Mine Baramulti Sukses Sarana", *Economic Times*, 09 November 2012, Available at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-11-09/news/34994178_1_pt-antag-gunung-meratus-pt-arutmin-indonesia-tata-power>, Accessed on: 11 November 2012.

²⁵ "Afghanistan, Indonesia Strengthen Ties with Agreements", *tolonews.com*, 10 November 2012, Available at <<http://tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/8275-afghanistan-indonesia-strengthen-ties-with-agreements>>, Accessed on: 21 December 2012.

²⁶ Indonesia's Former Trade Minister Enters Race to Lead WTO", *The Jakarta Globe*, 20 December 2012, Available at <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/news/indonesias-former-trade-minister-enters-race-to-lead-wto/562762>>, Accessed on: 21 December 2012.

located on the Laos-Vietnam border, has been awarded to a Malaysian company, Giant Consolidated Ltd. The total cost of this construction is an estimated US\$5 billion. Construction will begin next year and be completed by 2018.

The rail connecting Laos to China is a part of the proposed Southeast Asia network. Plans have been approved to launch a 420 km line connecting Laos' capital Vientiane to China's Luang Namtha province. China will finance the construction through a U.S \$ 7 billion loan through Exim Bank. Laos's officials hope that by launching the high speed rail network, they would be able to open the land-locked and impoverished nation to development.²⁷

Laos to Begin Construction on the Debated Mekong Dam

Laos held groundbreaking ceremony on November 07, 2012 on the site of the dam. Construction on the \$ 3.6 billion hydropower dam began in the same week. This hydropower plant is the first of the eight that Laos plans to build on the Mekong river. It hopes to sell electricity to its neighbours to expand its economy. The Mekong river also runs through Myanmar, Cambodia and Thailand from its source in China's Tibetan plateau. Environmental and social concerns have

been voiced over this project by all the countries involved and by many environmentalist experts.²⁸

Laos Held Responsible for Disappearance of Human Rights Activist

The government of Laos has been held responsible for the disappearance of the human rights activist Sombath Somphone. While the government has denied responsibility, human rights activists disagree. UN human rights office believes he has been kidnapped due to the nature of his work. Sombath was last seen on December 15, 2012 in Laos's capital Vientiane. A video footage on You Tube shows him being taken into a car by unidentified men in civilian clothes outside a police post. UN human rights office has been extremely concerned about the safety of Sombath and has urged the authorities to do everything possible to find Sombath.²⁹

Laos Joins WTO

Laos will formally join the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2013. The country ratified its membership of the World Trade Organization on December 7, 2012. The Laotian parliament formally gave their consent on December 6, 2012. Laos is one of the poorest nations in Southeast Asia and the only one to have joined the ranks of WTO. Laotians believe that this would be an opportunity to benefit from market liberalization.³⁰

²⁷ "Laos Links Rail to Neighbors", *Radio Free Asia*, 09 November 2012, Available at < <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/rail-11092012183703.html>>, Accessed on: 11 December 2012.

²⁸ Daniel Ten Kate, "Laos to Start Building Mekong Dam This Week Amid Opposition", *Bloomberg*, 05 November 2012, Available at < <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-11-05/laos-to-start-building-mekong-dam-this-week-amid-opposition-1-.html>>, Accessed on: 11 December 2012.

²⁹ "UN Abduction of Human Rights Activist Tied to Rights Work", *abc News*, 21 December 2012, Available at http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/abduction-laos-activist-tied-rights-work-18033739#.UNftjuS-r_A>, Accessed on: 23 December 2012.

³⁰ "Laos Ratifies WTO Membership", *thewest.com.au*, 07 December 2012, Available at <http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/business/a/-/world/15582457/laos-ratifies-wto-membership/>>, Accessed on: 23 December 2012.

Malaysia

Malaysia-EUFTA begin FTA Talks

Malaysia and European Free Trade Association on November 05, 2012 agreed to begin negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA). The Malaysian International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed told reporters that the negotiations would begin in the next four months and were expected to be concluded within a span of the next two years. He hoped that the Malaysia-EFTA free trade agreement will improve Malaysia's trade competitiveness in Europe. The announcement of the proposed FTA negotiations was jointly made by Mustapa and Johann N. Scheider-Amman, Switzerland's Minister for Economic Affairs representing EFTA.³¹

Oil Field Discovered near Northeastern Malaysia

The Malaysian Prime Minister's office recently announced the discovery of an oil field located 160 km off-shore the Northeast of Kuantan in the state of Pahang at a depth of 78 metres. Crude oil production will begin in 2014 and the output is projected at 17,000 to 20,000 barrels per day. The well was discovered in a joint-venture exploration project by

Petronas, the state oil company and the Sweden based Lundin Petroleum AB.³²

Malaysia to Open More Visa Centres in India

Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has said that Malaysia will be opening more visa centres in India soon. He has been quoted as saying "There are now five centres, and we hope to have more in the smaller cities. The smaller cities are not all that small. They are just small in the Indian context, but (to us) they are huge by any stretch of the imagination." Applying for and receiving Malaysian visas is set to get easier as well. Currently there are five visa centres - in New Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Calcutta.³³

Malaysia Receives Special Award for Service in Afghanistan

Malaysia's efforts for rebuilding in Afghanistan have been appreciated with a special award. The United States Agency for International Development award was awarded to the Malaysian contingent serving with the International Stabilization Force. The award was given at the Defence Ministry and was received by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi. The country's efforts in Afghanistan have further been recognized by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, the Korean International Cooperation Agency, the US military and the US Aid Relief Agency. Up until now 200 Malaysian military personnel have

³¹ "Malaysia, European Body to begin FTA Talks", *Business Times*, 05 November 2012, Available at < http://www.btimes.com.my/Current_News/BTIMES/articles/20121105150616/Article/index.html>, Accessed on: 11 December 2012.

³² "Oil-Field Discovered Off North-Eastern Malaysia", *The Nation*, 31 October 2012, Available at < <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/breakingnews/Oil-field-discovered-off-north-eastern-Malaysia-30193423.html> >, Accessed on: 11 December 2012.

³³ "Malaysia to Open Up more Visa Centres in india, says PM", *News Track India*, 22 December 2012, Available at <http://www.newstrackindia.com/newsdetails/2012/12/22/79-Malaysia-to-open-more-visa-centres-in-India-says-PM-Najib.html>>, Accessed on: 23 December 2012.

provided humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, particularly medical assistance in the Bamyán province.³⁴

Myanmar

Myanmar's Suu Kyi Visits India

Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi visited India from November 13th – November 18, 2012. This is her first visit to the country in four decades. She met separately with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai. Details of the meetings are yet to be released. She was scheduled to deliver a public lecture, tour the parliament and visit her alma mater Lady Sri Ram College in Delhi.^{35,36}

World Bank Approves New Aid for Myanmar

The World Bank has approved of \$80 million in development aid to Myanmar. In addition to this, the bank has another \$165 million committed in assistance to Myanmar. These funds will be channeled

to the country as soon as it clears its \$900 million in debt arrears to the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. The World Bank is re-engaging with Myanmar after a gap of almost twenty years. The bank in August 2012 opened an office in Yangon, whose board of directors will provide technical assistance and advice to Myanmar's government on management of public finances, regulatory reform and private sector development.³⁷

Long Awaited Foreign Investment Law Cleared

Myanmar's President Thein Sein signed the long awaited Foreign Investment Law on November 02, 2012. Details of the legislation are likely to be published soon by the state media. Details passed on Reuters reveal that the clause that required at least 35 percent of start-up capital by foreign investors in any joint venture with local partners has been dropped. Another that had stipulated a limit of maximum 50 percent on ownership by foreigners in joint ventures in certain sectors has been changed as well. The new draft does not make a mention of any such ration and applies it to very few areas. These changes have been initiated by the President's office.³⁸

³⁴ Adrian David, "US Awards Malaysia with for Service in Afghanistan", *News Strait Times*, 18 December 2012, Available at <<http://www.nst.com.my/nation/general/us-awards-malaysia-for-service-in-afghanistan-1.187937#ixzz2FZJpi6rh>>, Accessed on: 23 December 2012.

³⁵ "Myanmar Leader Suu Kyi Arrives in India, to Meet Prime Minister", *IBN Live*, 13 November 2012, Available at <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/myanmar-leader-suu-kyi-arrives-in-india-to-meet-prime-minister/305384-3.html>>, Accessed on: 11 December 2012.

³⁶ "Myanmar's Suu Kyi Meets with Top Leaders in India", *The Times of India*, 14 November 2012, Available at <http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-11-14/india/35111144_1_suu-kyi-nehru-memorial-lecture-myanmar-opposition-leader>, Accessed on: 11 December.

³⁷ "world Bank Approves New Aid for Myanmar", *The Times of India*, 02 November 2012, Available at <http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-11-02/south-asia/34876888_1_thein-sein-yangon-myanmar>, Accessed on: 11 December 2012.

³⁸ "Myanmar's President Signs Long-Awaited Foreign Investment Law", *Reuters*, 02 November 2012, Available at <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/02/us-myanmar-investment-idUSBRE8A10U120121102>>, Accessed on: 11 December 2012.

Myanmar to Scale down Dawei

Myanmar is likely to reduce the size of the deep sea port and industrial estate in Dawei. Myanmar's proposal has given Thailand a cause for grave concern since it could affect related projects. Myanmar's intention was announced during President Thein Sein's visit to Thailand. The Malaysia President has also declared his intent to invite other overseas investor, especially Japan to Dawei. This move, according to Myanmar would be of great benefit in the long term, since Japan had the sources for long term investment. Thailand is yet to respond to Myanmar's proposal.³⁹

President Thein Sein Invites India to Invest

President Thein Sein during his visit to India invited Indian businessmen to invest in Myanmar's agriculture, energy and infrastructure sectors. In a closed-door session organized by the Confederation of India Industry (CII) on 21 December 2012, he urged Indians to consider investing in Myanmar. In response, CII president Adi Godrej proposed a five-point agenda to strengthen India-Myanmar business relations. S. Ramadorai, advisor to Prime Minister on skill development and vice-

chairman of Tata Consultancy Services; B. Muthuraman, vice-chairman of Tata Steel; Arun Nanda, director of Mahindra & Mahindra; Ravi Kant, vice-chairman of Tata Motors; and Ganesh Natarajan, chief executive officer of Zensar Technologies were also present during the meeting.⁴⁰

The Philippines

Philippine Pushes Forward on the South China Sea Dispute

Philippine President Benigno Aquino has exhorted all Southeast Asian countries to present a united front to China during the East Asia Summit held in Cambodia this year. He told reporters "We can talk to the other claimants that aren't ASEAN members but since we want to maintain ASEAN's centrality, we must have just one voice in ASEAN... in this regard".⁴¹ Philippines also raised the issue at the Asia-Europe Summit held from November 5 to 6th in Laos. The Philippine President pushed forward the issue saying that 'vital global shipping lanes were at stake'. The President has raised this issue during bilateral meetings with the European Union; with Swiss President Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf and Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg.⁴²

³⁹ "Myanmar wants to Scale Down Dawei", *The Bangkok Post*, 19 December 2012, Available at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/local/326842/myanmar-wants-to-scale-down-dawei> >, Accessed on: 23 December 2012.

⁴⁰ "Myanmar Invites India to Invest in Infrastructure, Power", *dajjiworld.com*, 22 December 2012, Available at <http://www.dajjiworld.com/news/news_disp.asp?n_id=158801>, Accessed on: 23 December 2012.

⁴¹ "Philippine Urged ASEAN to Unite on Sea Dispute", *Breaking News*, 15 November 2012, Available at <http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/se-asia/story/philippines-urges-asean-unite-sea-dispute-20121115>>, Accessed on: 12 December 2012.

⁴² "Philippines Pushes Sea Row at Asia-Europe Summit", *The Business Recorder*, 05 November 2012, Available at <http://www.brecorder.com/world/southeast-asia/89034-philippines-pushes-sea-row-at-asia-europe-summit.html> >, Accessed on: 12 November 2012.

Philippines Bolsters its Military

Philippines and Canada have decided to scale up their defence cooperation. The two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which will allow the Philippines to procure the required defence and security equipment from Canada. The deal was announced during Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's visit to the Philippines from 9 to 11 November'12.⁴³

In addition to the deal with Canada, Philippines has also begun negotiations with Australia whereby Australia will be able to participate in the Philippine-US Balikatan exercise and Philippine troops will be a part of Australian exercises with other nations. Australia will also be contributing to building Philippine defence capacity by providing a number of graduate and training courses along with subject matter experts and mobile training in 2013.⁴⁴

Philippines Passes Landmark Legislation

The Philippines has passed landmark legislation criminalizing 'enforced

disappearances'. Under this law, abductions carried out against by anti-government activists and critics will be treated separately from the crime of kidnapping. Offenders could face life in prison. Furthermore, secret detention facilities are prohibited; and the power to conduct regular, surprise inspections of detention facilities has been given to the government. This is a first of kind law in the region.⁴⁵

Super Typhoon Wrecks Philippines

The death toll caused by the Super Typhoon Bopha that struck Southern Philippines on December 4, 2012 has risen to nearly more than 1000 and is likely to rise even higher according to the National Disaster Relief Agency. Approximately 850 are missing and have forced roughly 27,000 people to seek shelter in evacuation centres.⁴⁶ Although extensive damage has been incurred to the infrastructure and the buildings, a precise figure is yet to be released by the Philippine government. The areas of Compostela Valley and Davao Oriental in Mindanao have suffered maximum damage. A state of national calamity had been declared by President Benigno Aquino.⁴⁷

⁴³ Mark Kennedy, "Canada Signs Military Sales Deal with Philippines", *The Gazette*, 10 November 2012, Available at <<http://www.montrealgazette.com/news/Canada+signs+military+sales+deal+with+Philippines/7530276/story.html>>, Accessed on: 12 December 2012.

⁴⁴ "Philippine, Australia to Cooperate on Military Exercises", *The Global Times*, 11 November 2012, Available at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/743562.shtml>>, Accessed on: 12 December 2012.

⁴⁵ "Philippines Criminalises State Abductions", *The International News*, 23 December 2012, Available at < <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-1-150036-Philippines-criminalises-state-abductions>>, Accessed on: 23 December 2012.

⁴⁶ "Typhoon Bopha: Death Toll Passes,1000", *BBC News*, 16 December 2012, Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20745450>, Accessed on: 23 December 2012.

⁴⁷ "Typhoon Bopha: Fears of Philippines Missing", *BBC News*, 09 December 2012, Available at < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20656846>>, Accessed on: 23 December 2012.

Singapore

Landmark Singapore-EU FTA to be completed by 2012 End

FTA between EU and Singapore is expected to be completed by end of this year. The FTA will also have a chapter on investments; the first of its kind for any trade deals EU HAS made till date. According to Ambassador Marc Ungeheuer, head of the EU delegation in Singapore, having a chapter on investments was logical owing to the safe investment climate of Singapore. He also described this deal as a 'building block' for a wider FTA with ASEAN. FTA negotiations are already underway with Malaysia and Vietnam.⁴⁸

India-Singapore Conclude Joint Air-Force Exercises

India and Singapore held their eighth Joint Military Training (JMT) between the Indian Air Force and the Republic of Singaporean Air Force at Air Force Station, Kalaikunda in West Bengal. It was a six week, day and night joint exercise, where IAF's Su-30 MKI and MiG-27 aircraft participated with RSAF's F-16D Block 52+ Fighting Falcons. The RSAF detachment was made up of 30 officers

and 87 personnel. Soldiers from both the countries also participated in cultural and sports activities. JMTs are held every year under bi-lateral agreement signed between the two countries. The first JMT was held in 2006.⁴⁹

Singapore to Send Soldiers to Gulf of Aden

Singapore is set to deploy the third team of sailors and soldiers for a period of three months to the Gulf of Aden to participate in the multi-national anti-piracy patrols. The deployment was announced by Senior Minister of State (Defence) Chan Chun Sing on December 13, 2012, at a ceremony held to welcome the Singapore Armed Forces servicemen that had served in the Gulf of Aden since September. This three month deployment will be Singapore's eight contingent sent to patrol off the coast of Somalia since 2009.⁵⁰

Thailand

Thailand's PM Visits Queen

Thailand's first woman Prime Minister, Yingluck Shinawatra had an audience with the Queen during her four day visit to Britain. The aim of the visit had been to strengthen ties and forge greater cooperation between the two countries. Her visit coincided with the 400th anniversary of bilateral relations between Thailand and

⁴⁸ "EU-Singapore FTA by end-2012", *channelnewsasia*, 03 November 2012, Available at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporebusinessnews/view/1235096/1/.html>>, Accessed on: 12 December 2012.

⁴⁹ "Indo-Singapore Joint Military Training Concludes in WB", *Business Standard*, 30 November 2012, Available at <http://www.business-standard.com/generalnews/news/indo-singapore-joint-military-training-concludes-in-wb/86323/>>, Accessed on: 25 December 2012.

⁵⁰ Jermyn Chow, "Gulf of Aden Anti-Piracy Patrols to be Managed by Third Singapore Team", *asiareport*, 13 December 2012, Available at <http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/singapore/story/singapore-send-third-team-gulf-aden-20121213>>, Accessed on: 25 December 2012.

Britain. During the visit Queen Elizabeth II has inquired about the well-being of Their Majesty the King and Queen of Thailand. Yingluck told reporters that “the queen’s words are important for the long-term relations between Thailand and the United Kingdom, as well as for the good relations between the royal families of the two countries”. She also met her British counterpart David Cameron and jointly announced the establishment of strategic dialogue of high officials of the two countries.^{51,52}

Panetta in Thailand to Renew Military Pact

US Defence Secretary, Leon Panetta arrived in Thailand on November 15, 2012 as a part of his Asian tour. The two countries have renewed their half a century old military ties with an agreement that was signed in Bangkok.⁵³ The agreement aims at strengthening the Thai’s military role in regional and maritime security. Although the agreement does not create any new initiatives or privileges between the two countries, the pact confronts new challenges such as natural and manmade

disasters, transnational threats and maritime security issues. Panetta visit to Thailand is the first visit between US and Thai defence ministers since 2008.⁵⁴

Thailand Installs the Best early Warning Centre in Southeast Asia

The National Disaster Warning Centre (NDWC) in Thailand has installed an early alert system and its related instrument along the Andaman coast. 136 warning towers and three tsunami detection buoys have been set by the centre. The system is able to calculate within a span of two minutes the speed of the waves after the formation of tsunami waves. Upon confirmation, alerts can be sent via short messages to 90 million cell phones immediately. The Thai National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) will in the near future be issuing a regulation to allow the centre to broadcast tsunami warning messages whenever necessary.⁵⁵

India-Thailand Set to Sign FTA

India and Thailand will be signing an FTA next month. A senior Thai official said “We hope to conclude negotiations for a comprehensive free trade agreement between India and Thailand

⁵¹ “Queen Elizabeth asks PM about Their Majesties’ Well-Being”, *The Nation*, 15 November 2012, Available at <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Queen-Elizabeth-asks-PM-about-Their-Majesties-well-30194376.html>>, Accessed on: 12 December 2012.

⁵² “Thailand’s PM to Meet the Queen”, *The Australian*, 11 November 2012, Available at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/breaking-news/thailands-pm-to-meet-the-queen/story-fn3dxix6-1226514606793>>, Accessed on: 12 December 2012.

⁵³ “Panetta in Australia to Boost Military Ties”, *The Australian*, 15 November 2012, Available at <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/breaking-news/panetta-in-thailand-to-boost-military-ties/story-fn3dxix6-1226517684799>>, Accessed on: 13 December 2012.

⁵⁴ Ron Corben, “US Renews Military Pact with Thailand”, *Voice of America*, 15 November 2012, Available at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-continues-deepening-ties-with-asia-by-renewing-military-pact-with-thailand/1546736.html>>, Accessed on: 13 December 2012.

⁵⁵ Chularat Saengpassa and Pongphon Sarnsamak, “Thailand’s Tsunami Warning System Finally Ready, After 8 Years”, *The Jakarta Post*, 25 December 2012, Available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/12/25/thailands-tsunami-warning-system-finally-ready-after-8-years.html>, Accessed on: 25 December 2012.

latest by January 2013, though there are efforts to push it even earlier than this, may be before end of current year". However, many issues with regards to investment are yet to be resolved. This time India is pushing for a greater role from Thailand since greater access was provided to Thailand in the FTA in Goods. This time Thailand has offered concessions on 150 tariff lines against 52 tariff lines offered by India. In exchange Thailand is seeking assurance on stability of exchange rate, emergency safeguard measures and greater access for its workforce in sectors such as spa and massage services, restaurants and multi-brand retail services in India.⁵⁶

Vietnam

\$7 Billion set as trade Target by India and Vietnam

On 1st November 2012, India and Vietnam set a trade target of \$7billion that was to be achieved by the year 2015. Union Minister for Commerce, Industry & Textiles, and Anand Sharma has expressed his confidence in achieving the set target. He told reporters "...With the implementation of India-ASEAN FTA by India and Vietnam since June 1, 2010, bilateral trade would maintain the present growth momentum and would achieve the target". In 2011, trade between both the

countries was valued at \$5.017billion.⁵⁷

During his meeting with Dr. Vu Huy Hoang, Vietnam's Minister for Trade and Industry, Mr. Sharma also raised the issue of land acquisition for Tata Steel's USD 5 billion steel project in the country and has asked for speedy resolution of all outstanding issues. Tata Steel plans to set up a 4.5 million tonnes per annum integrated steel plant in Vietnam's Ha Tinh province over a period of 10 years. This would be India's single largest investment in the Southeast Asian nation.⁵⁸

China tells Vietnam to halt oil exploration in disputed waters

China has asked Vietnam to halt ongoing oil and gas exploration activities and to stop harassing Chinese fishermen in the area where Vietnam's claim overlaps with the waters of Hainan province. This cryptic message comes after a recent incident of confrontation between Chinese fishing vessel and a Vietnamese ship. According to Chinese Foreign expelled by Vietnamese military vessels. However, Vietnam's description of the incident widely differs. According to Vietnam, a seismic cable being pulled by a Vietnamese ship was cut by two Chinese fishing ships. Similar warnings have been issued by China in the past. Commenting on this issue, Washington said it was aware of the incident and asked the Chinese government to clarify the revised regulations. In reference to this incident, India has said that

⁵⁶ Yogima Seth Sharma and KR Sudhama, "India to Sign FTA with Thailand", *Financial Chronicle*, 21 December 2012, Available at <http://www.mydigitalfc.com/news/india-sign-fta-thailand-468>>, Accessed on: 25 December 2012.

⁵⁷ Sujay Mehdudia, "India-Vietnam Set a Trade target of \$7billion for 2015", *The Hindu*, 01 November 2012, Available at < <http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/indiavietnam-set-a-trade-target-of-7-billion-for-2015/article4054859.ece>>, Accessed on: 13 December 2012.

⁵⁸ "India Asks Vietnam to Quicken Process for Tata Steel Plant", *moneycontrol.com*, 01 November 2012, Available at http://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/india-asks-vietnam-to-quicken-process-for-tata-steel-plant_776591.html> Accessed on: 13 December 2012.

it was prepared to send navy ships into the region to safeguard its interests.⁵⁹

Iran-Vietnam Look Forward to Stronger Ties

Iran and Vietnam are both ready to increase cooperation and expand their ties with each other. Ali Akbar Salehi, Iranian Foreign Minister in a meeting with visiting Chairman of Vietnamese National Assembly Committee for Security and Defense Nguyen Kim Khoa on December 24, 2012 conveyed Iran's readiness to cooperate with Vietnam in economic, trade, parliamentary and cultural cooperation. The Vietnamese official in turn expressed Vietnam's willingness to expand ties with Iran. He described a recent visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Vietnam as a major step forward in their relations.⁶⁰

Australia

Australia-India Trade to Increase

South Australia has become the latest state to focus on enhancing its economic relationship with India. Premier Jay Weatherill unveiled the South Australia – India Engagement Strategy at Adelaide

University's Centre for Asian Studies on 31st October. This is a ten year strategy, where South Australia will focus on energy, education and environmental services. His counterpart Premier Barry O'Farrell of New South Wales has also signed agreements with various Indian trade and government agencies recently. Other Australian states are gearing up to take benefit of trade with India.⁶¹

Australia Warned Against "False Choice" on China

Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating had recently accused the Australian federal government of having undermined its foreign policy towards its key Asian neighbours by sticking to China. Australia had been marginalized in regional diplomacy as a result. Following Australian PM Paul Keating's remarks, United States Secretary of State Hilary Clinton warned Australia against making a "false choice" between its relationship with United States and China. However, Foreign Minister Bob Carr hastened to undo the damage and has assured of "predictability" in China's relationship with the US.⁶²

Australia Welcomes Afghan Humanitarian Employees

Defence Minister Stephen Smith and Immigration Minister Chris Bowen on

⁵⁹ Michael Martina, "China tells Vietnam to Halt Oil Exploration in Disputed Waters", *Reuters*, 07 December 2012, Available at <http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/12/06/china-sea-idINDEE8B50FS20121206>>, Accessed on: 25 December 2012.

⁶⁰ "Iran Ready to Enhance Cooperation With Vietnam: Salehi", *PressTV*, 25 December 2012, Available at < <http://presstv.com/detail/2012/12/25/280001/iran-ready-to-expand-ties-with-vietnam/>>, Accessed on: 26 December 2012.

⁶¹ "Australia Pushes for More Trade with India", *gulfnews.com*, 04 November 2012, Available at <http://gulfnews.com/business/economy/australia-pushes-for-more-india-trade-1.1097971>>, Accessed on: 13 December 2012.

⁶² Mark Baker and Bianca Hall, "Clinton Warns Australia Against "False Choice" on China", *The Sydney Herald*, 15 November 2012, Available at <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/clinton-warns-australia-against-false-choice-on-china-20121114-29cck.html>>, Accessed on: 13 December 2012.

December 13, 2012 announced the Australian government's decision to offer resettlement to those Afghan drivers and interpreters that worked for the Australian government in Afghanistan and might consequently be at risk after the transition has occurred. The eligible Afghan employees and their direct families could apply for a visa under the Australian Humanitarian Programme. The visas will be granted from the 20,000 per year refugee intake. Most of the Australian Defence Forces are expected to be home by the end of 2014.⁶³

Four Point Plan to Curb Illegal Immigrants from Sri Lanka

Australia has announced a four point plan to curb the flow of illegal immigrants from Sri Lanka. Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr, discussed this idea with Sri Lankan leaders during his three day visit to the country. The four point plan would include intelligence and information sharing along with additional surveillance and electronic equipment that would be provided by Australian authorities to Sri Lanka to improve its capacity to identify and target smuggling operations and vessels. He also said that Sri Lankan naval cooperation was integral for Australia to stop people smuggling. The Australian

government is also seeking permission from the Sri Lankan government to advertise in Sri Lankan media to deter people from making illegal voyages to the country.⁶⁴

New Zealand

John Key First NZ PM to Visit Myanmar

Prime Minister John Key became the first ever New Zealand PM to visit Myanmar. The trip is an endorsement of the changes that have recently been made in the country. The Cabinet has also decided to recognize the country by its official name, Myanmar. Mr. Key met with New Zealand companies such as the dairy giant Fonterra that are working in Myanmar. He also met with the pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar's President Thein Sein during his visit. He further announced the setting up of New Zealand's embassy and of cooperation and facilitation in rural development and food security.⁶⁵

India-New Zealand to Sign FTA by 2013

India and New Zealand are hoping to sign a FTA latest by 2013. Negotiations for a FTA began 18 months ago. New Zealand is hoping to persuade India to cut down on its high tariff rates on imported goods. New Zealand Primary Industries Minister David Carter said that there

⁶³ Judith Ireland, "Australia to Welcome Afghan Employees", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 December 2012, available at < <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/australia-to-welcome-afghan-employees-20121213-2bbyd.html>>, Accessed on: 26 December 2012.

⁶⁴ "Australia Announces Four Point Plan to Curb Illegal Immigration", *The Times of India*, 17 December 2012, Available at < http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-12-17/rest-of-world/35867939_1_illegal-immigration-4-point-plan-sri-lankan>, Accessed on: 27 December 2012.

⁶⁵ "President U Thein Sein Holds Talks with New Zealand Prime Minister Mr John Key", *President's Office, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar*, 23 November 2012, Available at <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/briefing-room/news/2012/11/23/id-1102>>, Accessed on: 13 December 2012.

was a fear of New Zealand, which is known for its quality food production of flooding the Indian markets with its good. However that was unlikely to happen. High Commissioner of New Zealand in India H E Jan Henderson said "We have reduced our tariffs because we believe free trade with small nations and we want to do good trade with all nations. There should not be artificial barriers. Bringing down the tariff level is also part of the negotiation with India".⁶⁶

Papua New Guinea

US to Boost Ties with PNG

The United States Pacific Partnership is set to be enhanced for the development of

Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. This move will result in improved bilateral relations between the two countries. The newly appointed US Ambassador to Papua New Guinea, Walter North in a press conference in PNG said that "The US wants to maintain good bilateral relations with Papua New Guinea and contribute to its development, therefore, collaboration between these three countries is very important". He also emphasized United States government continuing contribution towards women's empowerment in the country.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ "India-New Zealand FTA Likely by 2013", *MoneyControl.com*, 30 November 2012, Available at <http://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/india-new-zealand-fta-likely-by-2013_789228.html>, Accessed on: 27 December 2012.

⁶⁷ Bernadette Carreon, "US to Enhance Relations with PNG", *gantdaily.com*, 10 December 2012, Available at <<http://gantdaily.com/2012/12/10/us-to-enhance-relations-with-png/>>, Accessed on: 28 December 2012.

ABOUT US

The Southeast Asia and Oceania Centre focuses on policy-relevant research in respect of the ten ASEAN states, East Timor and Oceania, including Australia and New Zealand. The Centre studies India's bilateral and multilateral relations with states of the region with a view to providing contemporary relevance to India's Look East policy. It has a futuristic approach and examines the emerging trends in the regional security architecture. The Centre studies the potential for India's enhanced defence cooperation (including maritime issues) and cooperation in non-traditional security issues with the region. It examines internal developments of countries in this region, especially political transition and the role of the military, and their implications for India. The Centre seeks to promote Track-II institutional linkages with the region.

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