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Looking Eastwards From New Delhi

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Editor's Note

As *Insight Southeast Asia's* key objective is to identify and present the ongoing domestic as well as regional political-economic and defence-security updates in a neutral way, the most recent developments have been covered in this May-June issue.

These two months marked significant changes in the domestic political structure of Southeast Asia, especially with Rodrigo Duterte's accession to power as the new president of Philippines. It signified a return of the 'strongman' era in the Southeast Asian country. On the other hand, we have seen Malaysian prime minister trying to indulge himself into the politics of Islamisation of domestic politics by supporting implementation of Islamic Penal Code in a limited manner. In Cambodia, The UN is predicting a rise in political violence as the country is approaching the next general election in the years to come.

As long as India's relations with ASEAN as a multilateral body and with its individual members are concerned, significant augmentation have been witnessed in these two months. Not only Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parikkar decided to attend the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore, he had talks with his counterparts from various ASEAN countries including Singapore and Vietnam. Undoubtedly, India's defence and security relations with all these countries are enhancing. Indian naval ships had port calls to Vietnam and several other East Asian countries in between.

On the foreign policy ground, the region witnessed several important visits including US Secretary of State's visit to Myanmar.

Bilateral relations between and among ASEAN members are also progressing well. Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines have decided to join hands to fight sea piracy in the region. This happened in the background of Abu Sayyaf's abduction of few Indonesian sailors who were finally released by the Filipino terror group. Singapore and Myanmar are working towards visa exemption for travellers from each other.

In the international arena, Thailand was defeated by Kazakhstan to get a non-permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council. On the other hand, Fijian national, Peter Thomson was selected to be the President of the United Nations General Assembly.

In addition to these developments in the region, this issue of *Insight Southeast Asia* has a book review of 'Contemporary Malaysian Indians', edited by Denison Jayasooriya and K S Nathan.

We try to convey neutral and objective message about the recent developments as they are taking place in the region and as they are shaping the region's future course. We hope that our readers will enjoy reading the newsletter and send us their valuable feedback and suggestions to improve the same.

Thank you,

Dr. Sampa Kundu

Contemporary Malaysian Indians: History, Issues, Challenges and Prospect

Ed. Denison Jayasooriya and K. S. Nathan, Pub: Institute of Ethnic Studies, National University of Malaysia, Malaysia, 2016, pp- 640, ISBN: 978-967-0741-20-8, Price not available



Sampa Kundu

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The book, 'Contemporary Malaysian Indians: History, Issues, Challenges and Prospect', edited by Denison Jayasooriya and K. S. Nathan, captures a perspective on the bottom 40% of the Malaysian Indians, (especially those who represent the urban poor community) who has a long history of engagement and involvement with the Malaysian society and nation since the time of the British colonialism. The book is divided into seven parts, each elaborating on several issues that are important to understand the contemporary Malaysian Indians.

In the beginning of the book, one of the editors, K. S. Nathan, has beautifully sketched the major concerns of the Malaysian Indians and he has categorised them into ten parts including the need for an inclusive development, measure Malaysia's achievements using the Millennium or Sustainable Development Goals parameters, identifying social inequality as one of the root causes of urban poverty, the urgency for recognising the importance of Tamil school education, need for vocational and skill based training for the urban youth, encouraging the start-ups and

entrepreneurship, religious freedom, proper documentation for the Indian community living in Malaysia, ensuring equal participation of women in the economy of Malaysia and finally legal protection for them. (p. 2)

In the first part of the book, four authors have framed the historical context of the present issues overwhelming the contemporary Malaysian Indians. This segment gives us significant information like the demography of the Malaysian Indians in the country- they appear to comprise around 8% of the total population of Malaysia. Additionally, the Malaysian Indians are the largest Indian migrant community living outside South Asia. It also portrays the important role played by the Chettiar community in the development of Malaysia. However, the author, Ummadevi Suppiah concluded that the Chettiars played a very limited role in the economic development of the Indian community in Malaysia; though they emerged as the strongest moneylender and capitalist group in the country by the late 19th and early 20th Century.

Followed by the historical legacy, the concerns of the contemporary Malaysian Indians are noted down in the part II of the book. Authors of this segment have written about the causes

of despair amongst the Indian community in Malaysia which includes the Malaysian government's exclusive encouragement to the Bhumi Putra community. Mahalingam Marimuthu has discussed about the economic policies adopted by the government which surely had an adverse impact on the Indian community. He argued,

“The long pursuance of the neo-liberal economic strategy through the implementation of ethnic based affirmative action policies has stalled the faster economic growth and development of Malaysia”. (p. 140)

The segment on law, citizenship and religious freedom has elaborated on the laws and rules that categorically exclude the Indians from a number of rights which are otherwise considered as normal citizenship rights. In this section, narratives on Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) have particularly been useful to understand the social inequality and injustice done on the Hindus, which are primarily held responsible for social and political chaos in the country.

Section IV of the book deals with the sustainable/millennium development goals and Malaysia's response towards it. This section gives ample data and their analyses to explore several aspects of the Malaysian economy and its impact on the ethnic Indians. The poverty eradication programmes conducted by the government get highlighted here and recommendations have been put to evolve a more efficient administration to deal with the existing problems of poverty.

The following segment takes note of the schooling, education, skill training and youth population. In his chapter on the

importance of Tamil schooling for the ethnic Indians in Malaysia, N S Rajendran arguably noted that these schools provided educational opportunity to the minority Indians who, otherwise, would have been deprived of education. (p. 405) In the next segment, the authors have dealt with the entrepreneurship and need for vocational training for the Indian youths who have been either unemployed or not gainfully employed.

In the last section of the book, the minorities within the Malaysian Indians have received attention as the concerns of the Telegus and Sikhs were highlighted.

The book 'Contemporary Malaysian Indians' reflects upon the aspirations and challenges faced by the Indian community living in Malaysia and their life within the Malaysian society. In the conclusion, it has been argued that the Eleventh Malaysia Plan and the UN Agenda 2030 may give the Indians in Malaysia better targets to achieve by adopting an approach towards inclusive development.

Overall, this book offers the readers an interesting story on the Malaysian Indians, their problems and prospects. It surely has definite academic value as it is enriched with data and empirical analyses. However, it does not deal with two very important aspects of Malaysian Indians- first- what are the contributions of the ethnic Indians towards the development of Malaysia and second, how they can be used as a potential tool by India to enhance relationship between India and Malaysia. A third aspect should have been on the role of the ethnic Indians living in Malaysia as a bridge between India and Malaysia.

Despite its limitations, this book is one significant addition to the existing literature on the subject and would be useful for the researchers, policy makers and students of ethnic and area studies.

Southeast Asia

ASEAN

ASEAN-US, ASEAN- Australia, and ASEAN-New Zealand Strategic Partnerships

As ASEAN and the US became strategic partners in November 2015 and representatives of both sides met each other at Sunnylands, US in February 2016, the 29th ASEAN-US senior officials' dialogue, held in Malaysia in mid-May 2016, gained a special momentum. The Officials from both sides studied the progress in implementing the new ASEAN-US Plan of Action (POA) 2016-2020, adopted in September 2016. Both sides agreed that projects and activities proposed should be thoroughly and efficiently executed to get the benefits and strategic goals envisioned in the POA. Besides, they discussed about regional and international issues including recent developments in the South China Sea and the Korean Peninsula. They reiterated the importance of a rules-based regional and international order and adherence to the international law including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). They also spoke about peaceful resolution of disputes and the need to endorse maritime security and safety in the region. The rights of freedom of navigation, overflight and unimpeded lawful maritime commerce were other issues of discussion. The Meeting

appreciated the U.S.-ASEAN Connect initiative which was announced by President Obama at the Sunnyland's Summit as a new strategy to assist ASEAN in four areas, namely business, energy, innovation, and policy. The enactment of this initiative would include the establishment of ASEAN Connect Centers in Jakarta, Singapore, and Bangkok.¹

The 6th ASEAN-Australia Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) Meeting was held on 7 June 2016 at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta. Both sides noted with satisfaction the implementation of the ASEAN-Australia Plan of Action (2015-2019). ASEAN also conveyed its appreciation to Australia for its strong support for the "ASEAN Centrality" principle as well as for the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. They also spoke about the achievements made under the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA), including the extension of its Economic Cooperation support Programme to June 2018. ASEAN also acknowledged Australia's support for its active promotion of business opportunities in ASEAN, including through the publication, "*Why ASEAN and Why Now*" published in 2015, Australia also restated its commitment through the extension of the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Programme Phase II (AADCP II) to December 2019 with a total contribution of up to AUD 57.8 million. ASEAN too is looking forward to Australia's continued support in delivering the Post-2015 Agenda for ASEAN Connectivity and the implementation of the IAI Work Plan III (2016-2020). Both sides also applauded the formation of the Australia-ASEAN Council (AAC) in Australia

¹ "ASEAN and the United States Reaffirm Commitment to Strengthen the Strategic Partnership", ASEAN Secretariat News, at <http://asean.org/asean-united-states-reaffirm-commitment-strengthen-strategic-partnership/>, May 13, 2016, accessed on July 4, 2016.

in 2016 to develop people-to-people and institutional linkages in education, arts and culture. Both sides exchanged views on the future direction of ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Relations and highlighted potential areas of cooperation, such as innovation, science and technology, renewable energy, food security, connectivity, gender issues, youth leadership and private sector development. They also looked forward to the convening of the first biennial ASEAN-Australia Leaders' Summit in September 2016 in Vientiane, Lao PDR.²

The 4th ASEAN-New Zealand Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) Meeting was held on 3 June at the ASEAN Secretariat. The meeting noted the cooperation under the new ASEAN-New Zealand Plan of Action (2016-2020) and pointed out the positive achievements made in the first six months of implementation. The Meeting appreciated New Zealand's two key strategies which were declared at the Commemorative Summit in 2016, namely the People Strategy and Prosperity Strategy. As part of these strategies, New Zealand will escalate its contribution to over NZD 200 million in the next three years to support cooperation activities with ASEAN. The initiatives comprise of providing practical capacity building support to ASEAN Member States such as the Young Business Leaders Initiative, scholarships programmes, the English Language

Trainings for Officials and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training, among others. ASEAN also cherished New Zealand's much-valued financial and technical assistance under the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement Economic Cooperation Support Programme which has been stretched to June 2018 as well as the Initiatives for ASEAN Integration (IAI). ASEAN is looking forward to New Zealand's support for the IAI Work Plan III and the Post-2015 Agenda for ASEAN Connectivity which will be embraced in September 2016.³

ADMM Meeting

The ASEAN Defence Ministers celebrated the 10th anniversary of the formation of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) at the end of May. The ministers participated in a series of events organised by the Ministry of National Defence of Lao PDR as the Chair of the ADMM this year. They also showed up for a tree plantation ceremony at the Kaysone Phomviharn Academy of National Defence and attended the inaugural ceremony of the ADMM Photo Gallery at the Lao People's Army Museum. The Secretary-General of ASEAN said that "the 10th anniversary of the ADMM this year represents a milestone in the evolution of the highest defence cooperation mechanism within ASEAN. Having been established only in 2006, the ADMM has moved from dialogue and confidence-building to more concrete practical activities, especially with its partners." The ministers also shared views on issues threatening the region such as terrorism and

² "ASEAN and Australia to Further Strengthen their Strategic Partnership", ASEAN Secretariat News, at <http://asean.org/asean-and-australia-to-further-strengthen-their-strategic-partnership/>, June 8, 2016, accessed on July 4, 2016.

³ "ASEAN, New Zealand to further deepen cooperation as strategic partners", ASEAN Secretariat News, at <http://asean.org/asean-new-zealand-to-further-deepen-cooperation-as-strategic-partners/>, on June 6, 2016, accessed on July 4, 2016.

extremism, maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and cyber security. The ministers approved the Terms of Reference of the ASEAN Centre of Military Medicine and of the ASEAN Militaries Ready Group and the Concept Paper on the Establishment of the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Cyber Security. ADMM was formed in Kuala Lumpur in 2006 and since then, has made considerable progress. These achievements include establishment of the ASEAN Peacekeeping Centres Network, ASEAN Defence Industry Collaboration and the Direct Communication Links in the ADMM. The ADMM has also been holding the ADMM-Plus with the eight partners since 2010.⁴

East Asia Forum in Cambodia

The 14th East Asia Forum (EAF) under the theme “Deepening East Asia Integration towards East Asia Economic Community” was organised in Siem Reap in June 2016.

The key intents of the 14th EAF were as follows;

1. To maintain the important role of the EAF, which has helped as a useful network to exchange views and perceptions
2. To suggest practical ideas and recommendations on upholding the momentum of East Asia regional cooperation; nurturing an East Asian

regional identity; and finally, executing the vision of an East Asia Economic Community by 2020.

In his keynote address, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn highlighted the implication of the East Asia community building process, which requires the involvement of the governments, business sector, academic and think-tanks to build trust and confidence for the mutual interest of the ASEAN Plus Three countries. He spoke about strengthening the connectivity among and between the ASEAN Plus Three countries. The participants at the Forum have widely focused their deliberations on three topics including Role and Achievements of the East Asia Forum towards East Asia community-building; role of Private Sector in East Asia Economic Community-building; and enhancing People-to-People Connectivity in Fostering a Stronger Sense of Shared Culture and Economic Integration in East Asia. The two-day Forum was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia in collaboration with the ASEAN Plus Three countries and the ASEAN Secretariat.⁵

ASEAN-India

India in ADMM-Plus Counterterrorism Drill in Singapore

An Indian Naval Ship Airavat and an army contingent participated in a large counterterrorism and maritime security exercise in Singapore involving 18 countries which are part of ADMM-Plus. The 11-day ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus)

⁴ “ASEAN celebrates a decade of defence cooperation”, ASEAN Secretariat News, at <http://asean.org/asean-celebrates-a-decade-of-defence-cooperation/>, accessed on July 4, 2016.

⁵ “ASEAN to deepen East Asia Integration”, ASEAN Secretariat News, at <http://asean.org/asean-to-deepen-east-asia-integration/>, on June 16, 2016, accessed on July 4, 2016.

Maritime Security and Counter-Terrorism Exercise that began on May 2 aimed at strengthening the capability and inter-operability of the ADMM-Plus militaries to more effectively address terrorism and maritime threats. The exercise, co-hosted by Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF), involved about 3,500 personnel, 18 naval vessels, 25 aircraft and 40 Special Forces teams from all 18 ADMM-Plus countries. India, Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia and the US along with 10 ASEAN member countries made up ADMM-Plus. The strong contributions by the ADMM-Plus members attested to their commitment to enhancing regional peace and stability. India's active and positive contribution in numerous ASEAN-led mechanisms, namely the ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus as well as India's support for strengthening of the East Asia Summit was acknowledged by ASEAN member countries.⁶

Indian Naval ships go into South China Sea

Indian Naval Ships Sahyadri and Shakti went to Subic Bay for a three-day visit, as part of deployment of the Eastern Fleet to the South China Sea and Western Pacific. During the visit, the ships had professional interaction with the Philippines Navy towards further

cooperation between the two forces. In addition, calls on senior government and military authorities, sports and cultural interactions and sharing of best practices, aimed at strengthening ties and mutual understanding between the two Navies, were also planned. The visiting ships were also scheduled to conduct exercises with the Philippines Navy as well as search and rescue procedures, post departure from Subic Bay. The Navies of both countries have been interacting with each other regularly through port visits. The last visit by an Indian Naval ship to the Philippines was in October 2015, when INS Sahyadri berthed at Manila. The Philippines-India Joint Defence Cooperation Committee has been set up to enhance defence cooperation between the countries and has widened the scope of defence cooperation to include non-traditional threats as well.⁷

ASEAN Opposes India's RCEP Stand

Some nations, particularly those belonging to ASEAN, pushed for dismantling of three-tier system followed in the initial round of offers for goods liberalization during the recent trade negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in New Zealand. China is said to have triggered a sudden impasse. As part of India's current three-tier approach to tariff reduction, the ASEAN countries are being offered 80 per cent tariff liberalisation. Of this, 65 per cent elimination of tariff will come into force immediately after the agreement is implemented. Another 15 per cent tariff elimination will happen over a period of

⁶ "India takes part in ADMM-Plus counterterrorism drill in S'pore", Business Standard, May 10, 2016, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/india-takes-part-in-admm-plus-counterterrorism-drill-in-s-pore-116051000376_1.html, accessed on June 30, 2016

⁷ "Indian Naval ships enter South China Sea", The Hans India, May 31, 2016, at <http://www.thehansindia.com/posts/index/Andhra-Pradesh/2016-05-31/Indian-Naval-ships-enter-South-China-Sea/231553>, accessed on June 30, 2016

10 years. In the second tier, India has offered 65 per cent tariff elimination to South Korea and Japan, with whom it has free trade agreements (FTAs). These two countries offered 80 per cent tariff elimination to India. In third tier, India has proposed 42.5 per cent reduction in tariff lines to China, Australia and New Zealand. These countries will offer India 42.5 per cent, 80 per cent and 65 per cent tariff lines reductions, respectively. The ten-member ASEAN group, representing more than half of the participants of the proposed RCEP, submitted a paper against single tariff in the talks held last week in New Zealand at the behest of China. However, there was also a rift in ASEAN nations over this. China, having demanded greater tariff reduction before also, pushed ASEAN members Laos and Cambodia into opposing India's approach, which was later followed by Malaysia and Indonesia. However, Philippines and Singapore were not on board.⁸

Defence Minister Shri Manohar Parrikar at the Shangri-La Dialogue

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar attended Shangri-La dialogue held in Singapore on June 4. He referred to many subjects like terrorism, freedom of navigation, non-traditional security threats and various regional initiatives among others. For the first time, he cleared the air regarding the use of the term 'Indo-Pacific'. "For India, located as

we are at the centre of the Asian landmass astride the Indian Ocean, any reference to Asia implies its fullest geography ranging from the Suez to the shores of the Pacific. This is a vast area with many complexities... Today, I will, geographically speaking, limit myself to what is now aptly and increasingly referred to by the strategic community as the Indo-Pacific". He underlined India's Act East policy. "...this is also the domain of India's "Act East" policy in all its dimensions – cultural, economic and security". "Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines and Vietnam, all appear to be spending more on military capabilities. A closer look suggests the picture is more complex. In some cases, there is a catching-up happening after years of neglect of capital expenditure in defence", he said. According to him, the region faced three challenges. First, the possibility of traditional threat of disputes over territorial issues getting escalated as the military conflict. Second, terrorism being the foremost challenge to the region and the third challenge arose in the maritime domain, which is a key enabler of our prosperity. He made clear India's position regarding South China Sea. "We have traditional links with the countries in the South China Sea. More than half our trade passes through its waters. While we do not take a position on territorial disputes, which should be resolved peacefully without the threat or use of force, we firmly uphold freedom of navigation and overflight in accordance with international law, in particular the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea".⁹

⁸ Subhayan Chakraborty, "China-backed Asean opposes India's stand on RCEP", Business Standard, June 24, 2016, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/china-backed-asean-opposes-india-s-stand-on-rcep-116062301192_1.html, accessed on June 30, 2016

⁹ "Speech of the Defence Minister Shri Manohar Parrikar at the Shangri-La Dialogue", Press Information Bureau, Government of India, June 4, 2016, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=145975>, accessed on June 30, 2016

India, Singapore Boosting up Scale of Military Cooperation

India and Singapore on June 3 conducted the first dialogue between their defence ministers Manohar Parrikar and Ng Eng Hen. They agreed to augment the scale and complexity of existing bilateral military interaction. This comes at a time when freedom of navigation in international waterways has emerged as a major concern. Parrikar said, "I am very hopeful that this association with Singapore is going to build up to a much more than the strategic partnership," he added. He also called on Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong before the DMD. Parrikar said that the two sides also agreed to collaborate between industries. The agreement will also see the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) working with a Singapore research agency on research-oriented projects. Singapore minister Ng said, "We both agreed that we will work towards renewal of agreements" for training of Singapore armed forces in India from 2017 and 2018. Singapore and Indian armed forces interact frequently and "it is not a new relationship", said Ng. "Both countries would also want to deepen the complexity and engagement between our two militaries under the revised defence cooperation agreement," he said. A joint statement issued after the meeting said that both ministers committed to enhance the scale and complexity of existing bilateral exercises between the militaries. The minister emphasised the importance of international cooperation in tackling

transnational security threats. In particular, both ministers strongly condemned terrorism, and renewed their commitment to cooperation in counterterrorism efforts, emphasised the importance of safeguarding maritime security in international waterways.¹⁰

India, Vietnam to Expand Defence Cooperation

India and Vietnam decided to deepen defence cooperation after Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar met his counterpart on June 6 in Hanoi. Parrikar, who arrived in Vietnam on an official visit on June 5, met Vietnamese National Defence Minister, Gen. Ngo Xuan Lich and they reviewed the defence cooperation initiatives and focused on measures to further strengthen their bilateral defence relations. Visiting the elite 308 Division, India's defence minister complimented the efforts of the Vietnam People's Army on their contribution in the past. He also visited the Research and Development facilities of Viettel Group of industries and both ministers emphasized the need for greater defence industry cooperation. Parrikar also attended a business roundtable meeting comprising defence industry delegates from the two countries with the focus on enhancing defence industry networking, information sharing and exploration of possibilities for partnerships and collaborations between the two countries. It also saw the handing over of the bid document by Vietnam Border Guards to Larson & Toubro Ltd. India had recently provided Vietnam with a \$100 million Line of Credit which is being utilised by it for procurement of Offshore Patrol Boats for their Border Guards. On the mechanism of exchange of information, both

¹⁰ Gurdip Singh, "India, Singapore agree to enhance scale of military cooperation", Live Mint, June 4, 2016, at <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/jeRLZx3QF6ZN03Q2BzECSO/India-Singapore-agree-to-enhance-scale-of-military-cooperat.html>, accessed on June 23, 2016

leaders emphasised the necessity for sharing of white shipping information to facilitate exchange of information in the maritime domain. The two sides also focussed on enhancing hydrographic cooperation.¹¹

Visit of Indian Warships to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam

Indian Naval Ships Satpura and Kirch under the Command of the Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet, Rear Admiral S V Bhokare, YSM, NM arrived at Cam Ranh Bay on May 30 for a four day visit till May 3, as part of deployment of the Eastern Fleet to the South China Sea and Western Pacific. It was a demonstration of India's Act East policy and Indian Navy's increasing footprint and operational reach. During the visit, the IN ships had professional interaction with the Vietnam Peoples Navy towards further enhancing co-operation between the two forces. In addition, calls on senior Government and military authorities, sporting and cultural interactions and sharing of best practices, aimed at strengthening ties and mutual understanding between the two Navies, were also planned. The visiting IN ships were also scheduled to conduct exercises with the Vietnam Peoples Navy, aimed

at enhancing interoperability in communication as well as Search and Rescue procedures, post departure from Cam Ranh Bay. The visit sought to enhance maritime cooperation between the Indian Navy and the Vietnam Peoples Navy to further bolster the strong bonds of friendship between India and Vietnam and contribute to security and stability in this vital part of the world.¹²

Australia Supports India's Participation in RCEP

Australian High Commissioner Harinder Sidhu conveyed that Australia supported India's growing participation in the economic structures in the Asia-Pacific region that include Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). She said that Australia was keen to work with India to achieve a sufficiently ambitious Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) outcome. She added that the RCEP provided an ideal forum in which India can contribute to shaping and influencing the rules governing trade and investment in the region. "Australia is keen to work with India to achieve a sufficiently ambitious RCEP outcome", she said. In addition to RCEP, the other FTA Australia and India are both currently working on is the bilateral Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement – or CECA.¹³

¹¹ "India, Vietnam look at deepening defence cooperation", Business Standard, June 6, 2016, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/india-vietnam-look-at-deepening-defence-cooperation-116060601449_1.html, accessed on June 30, 2016

¹² "Visit of Indian Warships to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam 30 May- 03 June 2016", Business Standard, May 30, 2016, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/government-press-release/visit-of-indian-warships-to-cam-ranh-bay-vietnam-30-may-116053000459_1.html, accessed on June 23, 2016

¹³ Sanjeev Sharma, "Australia backs India's participation in ASEAN trade pact", The Tribune, June 2, 2016, at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/business/australia-backs-india-s-participation-in-asean-trade-pact/245350.html>, accessed on June 30, 2016

Northeast India- Act East Policy

PM Visited NE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 65th plenary session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in Shillong where he said: “The government has been focusing on development of the region through its proactive Act East Policy. As part of this policy, we are focusing on reducing isolation of the region by improving all-round connectivity through road, railway, telecom, power and waterways sectors.” He continued, “The northeast region is also very important to us for strategic reasons. It is my conviction that we have to bring this region at par with other developed regions of the country” and “In the current Budget, more than Rs 30,000 crore has been earmarked for the region.” “Based on the report of the Committee of Chief Ministers, we have decided to continue to provide assistance in the ratio of 90:10 for core Central schemes and 80:20 for non-core schemes to the northeastern states,” Modi said. He further said, “Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya were put up on the railway map. Agartala has been

connected with broad-gauge line. We are on way to ensure that all the northeastern states come on the railway map soon.”¹⁴ In another visit to Assam in May 2016, the prime minister said, “Assam is important for India’s act east policy. Northeast India development is closely linked to Assam developments.”¹⁵

Brunei

MOU between India and Brunei Darussalam

The Union Cabinet under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was apprised of the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between India and Brunei Darussalam in the field of Youth and Sports Affairs. The MoU between the two countries was signed on February 2, 2016 at Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei. Areas of cooperation between the two countries included exchange programmes in the fields of youth and sports, exchange programmes for the training of officers and trainers, promotion of sports between the participants with respect to sports facilities, sports equipment, sports training and physical preparation, sports fitness and physical education. In addition, it included areas like coaching, sports talent identification, sports management and administration, information system relating to youth and sports, science and technology development in

¹⁴ Samudra Gupta Kashyap, “Delhi’s focus on removing NE isolation through pro-active Act East Policy: Narendra Modi in Shillong”, The Indian Express, May 28, 2016, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/delhi-focus-on-removing-ne-isolation-through-pro-active-act-east-policy-pm-narendra-modi-in-shillong-2822072/>, accessed on July 4, 2016.

¹⁵ Bikash Singh, “Assam to be the focal point of India’s Act East policy: Prime Minister Narendra Modi”, The Economic Times, May 24, 2016, at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/assam-to-be-the-focal-point-of-indias-act-east-policy-prime-minister-narendra-modi/articleshow/52419196.cms>, accessed on July 4, 2016.

sports, development and enhancement of information in sports etc.¹⁶

Cambodia

Cambodia Deports Taiwan Nationals to China

Phnom Penh has deported 39 suspected 'Chinese' criminals to China and among them, 25 were from Taiwan. These people allegedly used internet service to make fraud calls to few Chinese people. Initially, the chief of the Interior Ministry's Immigration Investigation Bureau, Gen. Ouk Haiseila, had declared that the Taiwanese suspects were deported to China because Cambodia considers Taiwan as a part of China. Later, he said that they were deported to China because they made the crimes against Chinese nationals. Besides Cambodia, Malaysia and Kenya have deported internet scam criminals to China despite the fact that they were Taiwanese nationals.¹⁷

Political Tension in Cambodia is on the Rise

U.N. spokeswoman Devi Palanivelu said the Secretary General Ban Ki Moon is worried that the political tension between the ruling and opposition parties in

Cambodia may escalate in the face of upcoming general election that is scheduled for July 2018. "A non-threatening environment of democratic dialogue is essential for political stability and a peaceful and prosperous society," she mentioned. At present the veteran premier Hun Sen has ordered the media to write his name with certain dignity whenever his name is mentioned. Additionally, the opposition leaders in Cambodia are facing various legal charges. The main opposition leader Sam Rainsy is in exile as he wants to avoid jail punishment for legal charges.¹⁸

Novelli Visited Cambodia

U.S. Under Secretary of State Catherine Novelli visited Cambodia and met senior leaders and officials. She mentioned the bilateral trade between US and Cambodia is on the rise and right now it stands at USD 3 billion. She also spoke about the economic potential of Cambodia and its chance of becoming a partner in the US-led mega trade bloc TPP. Four months back, US Secretary of State John Kerry visited Cambodia and followed by these two visits, it can be expected that US-Cambodia ties will grow. Both US and Cambodia are interested in closer ties, especially in the trade and investment. However, it was reiterated that Cambodia has to work on absorbing more efficient people in the government and there is a need to refurbish the present administration.

¹⁶ "Cabinet apprised of the signing of MOU between India and Brunei Darussalam in the field of Youth and Sports Affairs", Business Standard, June 1, 2016, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-cm/cabinet-apprised-of-the-signing-of-mou-between-india-and-brunei-darussalam-in-the-field-of-youth-and-sports-affairs-116060101071_1.html, accessed on June 20, 2016

¹⁷ "Cambodia deports 39 to China, including 25 Taiwanese", Fox News, June 24, 2016, at <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/06/24/cambodia-deports-39-to-china-including-25-taiwanese.html>, accessed on July 5, 2016.

¹⁸ Louis Charbonneau, "U.N. concerned about rising political tensions in Cambodia", Reuters, May 29, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-politics-un-idUSKCN0YKoMI>, accessed on July 5, 2016.

Novelli also spoke about political stability and economic openness if Cambodia wants to attract foreign traders and investors in the country.¹⁹

East Timor

Timor Leste will join ASEAN in 2017

The Indonesian Ambassador to ASEAN, Rahmat Pramono, said on May 24 that the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste will become a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2017. “In 2011, when Indonesia was the head of the ASEAN, Timor Leste submitted an application to join ASEAN. The ASEAN member countries agreed to conduct a feasibility study of the new country,” the ambassador said. The feasibility study highlighted three pillars to evaluate the qualifications of Timor Leste to become a member of ASEAN. The three pillars are politics and security, economy and socio-culture. “The politics, security and economy studies have been assessed, while the socio-cultural assessment is expected to be completed by the end of this year,” Ambassador Rahmat noted. He added that in the near future, all representatives of ASEAN countries will meet to discuss Timor Leste’s joining the regional organization. Rahmat added that if approved, Timor

Leste will become the eleventh member country of ASEAN.²⁰

Indonesia

China Pledges Deeper Defence Ties with Indonesia After Sea Spat

China’s defence minister told his Indonesian counterpart, after a recent diplomatic spat in the South China Sea that China wanted deeper military ties with Indonesia on May 27. In March, Indonesia attempted to detain a Chinese trawler it accused of fishing in its exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea, prompting the Chinese coastguard to intervene. China had said that its vessels were operating in “traditional fishing grounds”. Meeting on the sidelines of a regional defence ministers meeting in Lao capital Vientiane, Chinese Defence Minister Chang Wanquan said that he hoped China and Indonesia would “deepen pragmatic exchanges and cooperation” and promote military ties.²¹

Indonesia Increases Defence Spending Following Natuna Incident

The Ministry of Defence allocated an additional Rp 8.1 trillion (\$607.5 million), raising its total budget for the year to Rp 108.7 trillion. The House of Representatives agreed to increase spending on national defense despite across-the-board cuts in this year’s revised state budget, underlining the country’s desire to boost the

¹⁹ Phorn Bopha, “US Official: Cambodia Could Join TPP Trade Pact”, June 13, 2016, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-official-cambodia-could-join-trans-pacific-partnership-trade-pact/3374858.html>, accessed on July 5, 2016.

²⁰ “Timor Leste to join ASEAN in 2017”, Antara News, May 25, 2016, at <http://www.antaranews.com/en/news/104864/timor-leste-to-join-asean-in-2017>, accessed on June 30, 2016

²¹ “After sea spat, China pledges deeper defence ties with Indonesia”, The Indian Express, May 27, 2016, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/after-south-china-sea-spat-china-pledges-deeper-defence-ties-with-indonesia-2821267/>, accessed on June 30, 2016

capacity of its armed forces to serve as a deterrent against potential foreign aggression. The decision came amid heightened tension between Indonesia and China regarding sovereignty over the southwestern tip of the South China Sea near the Natuna Islands in Riau Islands province. Earlier in June, Beijing unilaterally claimed the waters, which were part of Indonesia's special economic zone, as its traditional fishing grounds, after the east Asian country's boats were caught fishing illegally in the area.²²

Jokowi Visited Natuna Islands in Warship

Indonesia's president visited the Natuna Islands aboard a warship on June 23. He made this bold move to assert sovereignty over the area in the southern reaches of the South China Sea after Beijing stated an "overlapping claim" on nearby waters. President Jokowi's visit along with his chief security minister and foreign minister was described by Indonesian officials as the strongest message that has given to China over the issue. A presidential palace statement said that Jokowi intended to hold a Cabinet meeting aboard the warship. Beijing said that while China does not dispute Indonesia's sovereignty over the Natuna Islands, "some waters of the South China Sea" were subject to "overlapping claims on

maritime rights and interests." Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi rejected China's stance, saying the waters around Natuna were in Indonesian territory.²³

Indonesia and Australia Agree to Augment Intelligence, Counterterrorism Cooperation

Indonesia and Australia agreed to enhance counterterrorism cooperation following a meeting in Sydney, Australia, on June 8. The "Australia-Indonesia Ministerial Council on Law and Security" was a follow-up to the first meeting of the same name held in December 2015 in Indonesia, where delegations from both countries discussed ways they could coordinate to address international security threats. Meanwhile, Australian Attorney-General Senator George Brandis, who chaired the country's delegation, asserted that both countries were committed to combating terrorism financing, deradicalization, as well as cyber security.²⁴

Laos

Vietnam-Laos relationship

Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang held talks with his Laotian counterpart Bounnhang Vorachith in Vientiane on June 12, as part of a state visit to Laos scheduled for June 12-14. President Vorachith praised the visit of his guest as it was President Quang's first trip to Laos

²² "Indonesia Raises Defense Spending, Despite Budget Cuts, Following Natuna Incident", Jakarta Globe, June 23, 2016, at <http://www.jakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/business/indonesia-raises-defense-spending-despite-budget-cuts-natuna-incident/>, accessed on June 30, 2016

²³ "Indonesia leader, top execs visit Natuna isles in warship", The Japan Times, June 23, 2016, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/06/23/asia-pacific/indonesian-president-sails-south-china-sea-islands-stern-message-beijing/#.V3IkKU97IV>, accessed on June 30, 2016

²⁴ "Indonesia, Australia agree to enhance intelligence, counterterrorism cooperation", The Jakarta Post, June 9, 2016, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/06/09/indonesia-australia-agree-to-enhance-intelligence-counterterrorism-cooperation.html>, accessed on June 25, 2016

since his appointment, a symbol of respect for the special relationship between the two nations. The two heads of state agreed to continue the execution of the agreements signed by leaders of the two countries and push forward the result of the 38th meeting of the inter-governmental committee on Vietnam-Lao cooperation. The two heads of state were determined to effectively carry out the protocol on bilateral defense and security cooperation for the 2016-2020, the agreement on the management of the Vietnam-Laos borderline, the treaty on border trade, and others. The presidents reiterated the intention to coordinate closely to strengthen solidarity among ASEAN, elevating the bloc's central role in the region's security structure. They considered the significance of preserving peace, stability, security, and freedom in the East Vietnam Sea, and agreed to work with other ASEAN member states to settle any dispute peacefully and as per international law, namely the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the East Vietnam Sea (DOC). The two parties reached a consensus on enhancing the cooperation in the management and sustainable use of water resources in the Mekong River.²⁵

Premier Li, President Xi Meet Lao President Vorachit

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met with Lao President Bounnhang Vorachit on May 5, who was in Beijing for a three-day visit.

He also met President Xi during his visit. Premier Li said that the region had abundant opportunities for development, as 2016 was the first year after the establishments of the ASEAN Economic Community and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism. China was ready to work with Laos and other ASEAN countries to jointly promote cooperation. The year 2016 marked the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries. Chinese investments in the Southeast Asian country are rising in areas of infrastructure, hydropower, and special economic zones.²⁶

Malaysia

Islamic Penal Code Gets Support from the PM

Malaysia's PM Najib Razak has supported a Hudud bill, brought to the Parliament by the Islamist group Parti Islam se-Malaysia's (PAS) and that has stirred a fresh debate in the multi-ethnic country. The bill supports Islamic Penal Code which includes amputations and stoning. According to Najib's critics, the prime minister who is allegedly involved in many scandals, is trying to get Islamic support before the general election in 2018. As the ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional too has risen its voice against the bill, the prime minister came to defend himself by saying, "It applies only to certain offences and this comes under the jurisdiction of the Shariah court and is only applicable to the Muslims. It has nothing to do with non-Muslims." The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), a key partner in BN, claimed that "As we repeatedly

²⁵ "Vietnam-Laos cooperation part of special relationship", tuoitrenews, June 13, 2016, at <http://tuoitrenews.vn/politics/35321/vietnamlaos-cooperation-part-of-special-relationship>, accessed on June 23, 2016

²⁶ "Premier Li meets Lao President Vorachit", CCTV, May 5, 2016, at <http://english.cctv.com/2016/05/05/VIDEOgXJAnaLXzGQLoK0529z160505.shtml>, accessed on June 23, 2016

pointed out, the implementation of Hudud law is against the spirit of the Federal Constitution, and would ruin the inter-ethnic relationship in the country.”²⁷

Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines to Join Hands to Combat Piracy at Sea

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said on May 5 that Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines have agreed to conduct coordinated patrols in piracy-affected areas over South China Sea. They also decided to set up crisis centres in their respective countries to better respond to maritime emergencies. He added that these initiatives will be taken from the “best practices” of the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP), which was initiated in 2006 by the navies of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. The meeting was conducted in Yogyakarta after the kidnappings of few Indonesian sailors by Filipino rebel group. They noted that in the past five weeks, 14 Indonesian and four Malaysian seamen were kidnaped by abductors having linkages with the Abu Sayyaf group.²⁸

ASEAN Statement on SCS Withdrawn

In another setback to the unity of ASEAN, the secretariat has withdrawn its statement that had criticised Beijing in a

harsh way for not maintaining peace and stability in South China Sea by building up artificial islands and militarising the entire region. However, after few hours of the statement initially released by the Malaysian foreign ministry, the ASEAN secretariat has said that it would soften the language of the statement. A Malaysian foreign ministry spokeswoman said, “We have to retract the media statement by the ASEAN foreign ministers ... as there are urgent amendments to be made.” Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said, “We have checked with the ASEAN side, and the so-called statement reported by AFP is not an official ASEAN document.”²⁹

Myanmar

John Kerry Visited Myanmar

US Secretary of State John Kerry visited Myanmar and said, “Today my message is very, very simple: we strongly support the democratic transition that is taking place here.” After National League for Democracy’s electoral victory and their accession to power in March 2016, this was Suu Kyi’s first meeting with the US Secretary of State. As a recognition of the peaceful and democratic election and formation of the civilian government in Myanmar, US has lifted several sanctions from Myanmar; however, they are still keeping a

²⁷ Praveen Menon, “Outrage in multi-ethnic Malaysia as government backs Islamic law”, May 28, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-politics-idUSKCN0YJo4N>, accessed on July 5, 2016.

²⁸ Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja and Arlina Arshad, “Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines to conduct coordinated anti-piracy patrols in South China Sea”, The Straits Times, May 5, 2016, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-malaysia-and-philippines-to-conduct-coordinated-anti-piracy-patrols-in-south>, accessed on July 5, 2016.

²⁹ “ASEAN retracts South China Sea criticism: Malaysia”, Channel news Asia, June 14, 2016, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/asean-retracts-south/2871648.html>, accessed on July 5, 2016.

close eye on it and a bunch of military cronies and businessmen are still not allowed to do any trade and business with the US. Suu Kyi has said she is not afraid of any scrutiny and with the good efforts of the Myanmar government; all sanctions should be lifted in future. John Kerry also met the commander-in-chief of the Myanmar army- Min Aung Hlaing and both sides discussed about potential of multi-party democracy in the country.³⁰

Philippines

Duterte New President of Philippines

Rodrigo Duterte, a headstrong ‘punisher’ won the presidential election in Philippines and acceded to power on June 30. His success was almost ensured after two of his strongest contenders, Mar Roxas and Grace Poe decided to accept defeat to Duterte. During his electoral campaign Duterte used odd words against several people including Pope Francis and a dead Australian nun. Despite that, he came to power with 39% votes. Duterte has been known for his hardliner approach against criminals and he has taken vows to eliminate social evils like drug trafficking, smuggling etc. from Philippines. Duterte served as a mayor of Davao city for two decades and during his administration, Davao city got free from

everyday criminalities. Duterte is expected to bring the Ferdinand Marcos’s strongman days back to Philippines. He is also expected to take a U-turn in the foreign policy, as he may divert the focus from the US. He is reported to have expressed antagonism against US-Philippines Balikatan Exercises.³¹

Abu Sayyaf Releases Hostages from Indonesia

The Philippines National Police have confirmed that the Abu Sayyaf group, that had previously abducted 10 Indonesian sailors, has finally released them. The release of the hostages was an outcome of the negotiation between the government, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the kidnapers. The 10 were part of the tugboat Brahma 12 and they were abducted by the Abu Sayyaf while they were sailing from Jakarta to Batangas on March 26. The Indonesia’s National Intelligence Agency chief Sutyoso exposed that the kidnapers were initially asking for a \$1 million ransom for the release of the hostages. However, this was not confirmed by the Philippine government.³²

Singapore

Singapore and Myanmar: Visa Exemption to Boost Tourism Starting from December

Myanmar and Singapore citizens wont require a visa to travel between the two countries, starting from December. The visa exemption scheme was negotiated during a meeting

³⁰ PHYO HEIN KYAW, “John Kerry hails ‘remarkable’ Myanmar changes after Suu Kyi talks”, Frontier Myanmar, May 22, 2016, at <http://frontiermyanmar.net/en/news/john-kerry-hails-remarkable-myanmar-changes-suu-kyi-talks>, accessed on July 5, 2016.

³¹ Various newspaper and media sources

³² Gerg Cahiles, “Abu Sayyaf releases 10 Indonesian hostages”, CNN Philippines, May 1, 2016, at <http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2016/05/01/abu-sayyaf-group-asg-releases-10-indonesian-hostages.html>, accessed on July 6, 2016.

between State Counsellor and Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in Nay Pyi Taw on June 7. The 30-day visa-free travel agreement will take effect on December 1. The agreement will also help to improve Myanmar's international standing. Lee met first with President Htin Kyaw on June 7 for half an hour after a welcome by the honour guard in front of the presidential palace. In the following afternoon meeting, Suu Kyi and Lee also discussed tax agreements between the two countries, the extension of direct Singapore Airline flights to big cities in Myanmar and the opening of a Myanmar-Singapore hospitality and vocational training school. Myanmar has been implementing visa exemption agreements with fellow ASEAN members since 2009 when it signed an agreement with Laos. The agreements were all ideally supposed to be in place by 2014 when Myanmar chaired ASEAN. Myanmar had already signed visa-exemption memorandums of understanding with Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines.³³

Thailand

Suu Kyi Visited Thailand

Aung Saan Suu Kyi has paid a visit to Thailand to discuss many issues including

the fate of the migrant Burmese workers living in Thailand. This was her first high profile visit to Thailand after she came to power as the foreign minister of Myanmar. Reportedly, there are 3 million Myanmar nationals in Thailand, most of them are Buddhists and many are unregistered. The Rohingyas from Myanmar, who stay in Thailand along with many other Southeast Asian countries, felt that Suu Kyi should discuss about their problems with the stakeholders. Haji Ismail, one of the Rohingya representatives from Thailand mentioned, "All our hopes in the leadership of democratic statesmen have faded away..... Indeed we did not hope for this sort of harsh and negative political stance and undemocratic rhetoric from our Nobel peace laureate."³⁴ Suu Kyi met the Thai prime minister too.

Thailand Defeated in UNSC Non-Permanent Seat Voting

Thailand lost in a bid to win a non-permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council to Kazakhstan which got 138 votes against 55 votes for Thailand. Neither Kazakhstan nor Thailand received the required two-thirds majority of those present and voting in the 193-member General Assembly in Round 1, but Kazakhstan sailed to the election win in Round 2. Kazakh Foreign Minister Yerlan Idrissov mentioned, "We are very proud to be the first central Asian country to serve on the council" and pledged to focus on nuclear non-proliferation and development. Sweden, Ethiopia and Bolivia also got seats in the UNSC for 2017-18. Another seat will go to either Italy

³³ "Myanmar, Singapore agree on visa exemption to boost tourism", Bangkok Post, June 8, 2016, at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asean/1005001/myanmar-singapore-agree-on-visa-exemption-to-boost-tourism>, accessed on June 30, 2016

³⁴ Oliver Holmes, "Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss Burmese workers' rights on Thailand trip", The Guardian, June 23, 2016, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/23/aung-san-suu-kyi-to-discuss-burmese-workers-rights-on-thailand-trip>, accessed on July 6, 2016.

or Netherlands, two countries who were locked in a tie in the Round 2.³⁵

Vietnam

Vietnamese Deputy PM Meets leaders from East Timor, Indonesian

Deputy Prime Minister Trinh Dinh Dung met East Timor's Prime Minister Rui Maria de Araujo on the sidelines of the 25th World Economic Forum on ASEAN in Kuala Lumpur on June 2. He said that Vietnam treasured friendship and multi-faceted cooperation with East Timor. He urged the two countries to intensify delegation exchanges and enhance cooperation in combating crime, and for criminal judicial support. He asked East Timor to increase bilateral cooperation in the rice trade and implement the MOU on Rice Trade in the 2015-2017 period. On the same day, Deputy Prime Minister Trinh Dinh Dung and Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kala discussed ways to further improve the Vietnam-Indonesia Strategic Partnership. They agreed to organize the 7th session of the Joint Committee for Economics, Science and Technology Cooperation soon, and bring two-way trade to US\$ 10 billion by 2018. The Vice President said that Indonesia would work with Vietnam and other

ASEAN countries to implement the Chairman Statement at the 26th and 27th ASEAN Summits, and urged involved parties to abide by international law, especially the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to ensure peace, stability, security, and safety of aviation and navigation in the East Sea.³⁶

Vietnam Urges Japan for Vessels with the Aim to Strengthen Coastguard

Vietnam asked Japan to provide vessels to strengthen its coastguard. The request emerged during talks between visiting Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh on May 5. It manifested the growing ties among the states locked in maritime rows with China. Vietnam has been modernizing its military and recently bought six advanced Kilo-class submarines from Russia. Russia and India are the main source of advanced weapons, training and intelligence cooperation. Hanoi is also building ties with the United States and its Japanese, Australian and Filipino allies, as well as Europe and Israel. Japan is the second-biggest investor in Vietnam after South Korea, with existing projects totalling \$39 billion as of April 2016, based on Vietnam's government data. Two Japanese warships visited Cam Ranh Bay in central Vietnam in April, the first port call of its kind.³⁷

³⁵ "Thailand defeated in UNSC bid", Bangkok Post, June 29, 2016, at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/1022325/thailand-defeated-in-unscc-bid>, accessed on July 6, 2016.

³⁶ "Deputy PM meets East Timor, Indonesian leaders", Vietnamnet, June 2, 2016, at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/government/157441/deputy-pm-meets-east-timor-indonesian-leaders.html>, accessed on June 24, 2016

³⁷ Ho Binh Minh, "Vietnam asks Japan for vessels to strengthen coastguard", Reuters, May 5, 2016, at <http://in.reuters.com/article/vietnam-japan-vessels-idINKCNOXW1U5>, accessed on June 23, 2016

Oceania

Australia

Asylum Seekers Try to Avert Transfer to Nauru

Lawyers for more than 700 asylum seekers seeking a new life in Australia but held instead in Papua New Guinea filed an injunction on May 4. The injunction, filed in Australia's High Court, called for the asylum seekers to be sent to Australia and not to Nauru. Under Australia's hard-line immigration policy, asylum seekers were intercepted trying to reach the country by boat after paying smugglers and are sent for processing to a camp in Manus Island in Papua New Guinea or to Nauru. Papua New Guinea ordered the closure of the Manus camp after the country's Supreme Court ruled the facility unlawful, leaving the fate of few hundred people held there up in the air. The detention center on Nauru houses about 500 people and has been widely criticized by the United Nations and human rights agencies for harsh conditions and reports of systemic child abuse. The detainees on Manus and Nauru are mostly refugees fleeing violence in the Middle East, Afghanistan and South Asia.³⁸

Fiji

Fijian National to UNGA

In a rare and secret ballot vote, the United Nations General Assembly has elected Peter Thomson, Permanent Representative of Fiji, as President of its upcoming 71st session. The new President-elect defeated Andreas Mavroyiannis of Cyprus by a secret-ballot vote of 94 to 90, with one abstention. Mr. Thomson highlighted that his election is important as the first time a representative of a Pacific small island developing State will work as the General Assembly President. He mentioned that as a representative of such a State, he intended to be vocal on the issue of climate change. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon emphasised that the President-elect brings a broad perspective to his new role as he has years of experience in the international arena, both working for the Government of Fiji and in the private sector. Prior to this, Mr. Thomson worked as Chair of the Executive Board of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS). Mr. Thomson also worked as Vice President of the General Assembly from 2010 to 2011.³⁹

³⁸ Colin Packham, "Asylum seekers aiming for Australia try to prevent transfer to tiny Nauru", Reuters, May 4, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-asylum-idUSKCN0XVoOP>, accessed on June 25, 2016

³⁹ "General Assembly elects Permanent Representative of Fiji as President of 71st session", UN News centre, June 13, 2016, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54215#.V3ygXhIwOV0>, accessed on July 6, 2016.

New Zealand

John Key Visited Fiji

New Zealand Prime Minister John Key visited Fiji in an order that political tensions between Fiji and New Zealand gets minimised. This was the first visit by a New Zealand PM to the Pacific island nation since the military coup in the last decade. After the democratic election held in 2014, New Zealand has lifted the economic sanctions against Fiji. The visit came at a difficult time for Fiji. The Bainimarama government has been criticized by human rights groups for banning an opposition lawmaker from parliament for two years for comments she made about a government minister. Bainimarama defended the move and said that Tupou Draunidalo's comments were racially charged and threatened the stability of Fiji. Bainimarama first seized power during the 2006 coup and then retained his leadership role through the election. During Key's visit, he requested Fiji to lift ban on some New Zealand journalists who were charged for being hostile against Fiji. However, this request was turned down by Bainimarama.⁴⁰

Papua New Guinea

Bougainville and Papua New Guinea Set Date for Independence Referendum

Bougainville President John Momis and Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister Peter O'Neill agreed to work towards a 2019 referendum on independence. Bougainville is an autonomous part of PNG, and fought a decade-long civil war with the national government that ended in 1999. The region must hold an independence vote by 2020 under the terms of the Bougainville Peace Agreement. The PNG government also committed to funding referendum preparations. The decision will lead to full weapons disposal in Bougainville as some factions in Bougainville held onto their weapons after the conflict.⁴¹

President Mukherjee Visits Papua New Guinea

President Pranab Mukherjee visited Papua New Guinea between April 30 and May 2 where he met top leaders of the two countries and inked a few important deals as part of India's 'Act East' policy. In PNG, the President sought for freedom of navigation saying sea lanes of communications should be devoid of tension and rivalry. The two nations, as part of

⁴⁰ "New Zealand leader visits Fiji for first time in a decade", Bristol Herald Courier, June 10, 2016, at http://www.heraldcourier.com/news/world/new-zealand-leader-visits-fiji-for-first-time-in-a/article_5874f24f-e448-5ec2-a66a-db0b3e9af2e5.html, accessed on July 6, 2016.

⁴¹ "Bougainville and Papua New Guinea set target date for independence referendum", ABC, May 23, 2016, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-23/bougainville-referendum-set-for-2019/7436566>, accessed on June 23, 2016

measures to strengthen bilateral ties and ensuring energy security, signed a few agreements even as India offered a USD 100 million line of credit for development of infrastructure in PNG and agreed to jointly develop new avenues of cooperation to explore and develop the Pacific nation's vast oil and gas resources. India also offered the country, its technology, financial wherewithal, skilled manpower and institutional support to harness the mineral-rich country's abundant natural resources and establish mutually beneficial economic and commercial ventures.⁴²

Four Students Reported Dead After Police Open Fire

Four people were killed after police shot at a crowd of university student protesters

attempting to march on the Papua New Guinea parliament. The students had attempted to leave the university campus and head towards parliament house in Port Moresby, but were prevented by police. Students on the campus of the University of Papua New Guinea had been protesting and boycotting classes for five weeks, demanding that the Prime Minister, Peter O'Neill, resign over corruption allegations that have dogged his government for two years. But the peaceful on-campus protests erupted into violence when armed police prevented students from boarding buses to take them to parliament house.⁴³

⁴² "President Mukherjee wraps up 6-day visit to New Zealand, Papua New Guinea", Indiatvnews, May 2, 2016, at <http://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india-president-mukherjee-wraps-up-6-day-visit-to-new-zealand-papua-new-guinea-326935>, accessed on June 23, 2016

⁴³ Helen Davidson, "Papua New Guinea: four students reported dead after police open fire on march", The Guardian, June 8, 2016, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/08/papua-new-guinea-police-shoot-at-students-during-march>, accessed on June 30, 2016

Centre Activities for May and June 2016

- A delegation of security experts from National Security Council, Thailand, led by Professor Surat Horachaikul from India Studies Center, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, discussed the issue of emerging terrorism at the global level as well as in Southeast Asia, at IDSA on May 5, 2016.
- Dr. Sampa Kundu's commentary on 'Challenges before the New Governments in Southeast Asia' published by The Dialogue on May 6, 2016.
- Mr. Niranjana Chandrashekhara Oak's backgrounder on 'South Pacific: Gaining Prominence in Indian Foreign Policy Calculations' appeared on the IDSA website on May 10, 2016.
- Dr Sampa Kundu presented a paper on 'Regional Cooperation in BIMSTEC, with a Focus On Higher Education', through video-conferencing at the two-day international workshop on 'Need for Changes in the Course Curricula of Business Schools: Positioning & Competency of Business Schools in BIMSTEC Region'. The conference was jointly organised by IQAC and Department of Business Administration, Daffodil International University, Dhaka on June 4, 2016.
- Mr. Niranjana Chandrashekhara Oak's commentary, 'What's Between the Taliban and Iran?' appeared on The Diplomat on June 8, 2016.
- An 18-member delegation from the 16th Class of Defence Higher Course of the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies (CDSS) of Australia interacted with IDSA scholars on radicalization and terrorism; regional nodes of instability and ways India and Australia might work together to help address emerging issues on June 20 2016.

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.

Contributions are invited for:

Book Review (800 words)

Commentary (900 - 1300 words)

Photo Essay (10-12 photographs, each with a caption,
accompanied by a 1000 words essay)

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