



Introduction to India-ASEAN relations

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Abstract

Every country participates in International Politics in order to attain its national interests and accordingly it decides its foreign policy. There are some definite foundations or basis of bilateral on multilateral relations. Such relations can be analysed on the basis of identifying these foundations or basis. Indo-ASEAN relations are also no exception to this rule. India has been maintaining cultural and historical relations with South-East Asian nations. Impact and influence of Hinduism and Buddhism is seen on the life of the people of Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Asian Relations Conference was held in 1947. Here Prime Minister appealed for unity among Asian Countries. In 1955 Bandung Conference was held which stood in favour of Afro-Asian unity.

Keywords: India, ASEAN, NAM, look east policy

Introduction

Every country participates in International Politics in order to attain its national interests and accordingly it decides its foreign policy. There are some definite foundations or basis of bilateral on multilateral relations. Such relations can be analysed on the basis of identifying these foundations or basis. Indo-ASEAN relations are also no exception to this rule.

India has been maintaining cultural and historical relations with South-East Asian nations. Impact and influence of Hinduism and Buddhism is seen on the life of the people of Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Asian Relations Conference was held in 1947. Here Prime Minister appealed for unity among Asian Countries. In 1955 Bandung Conference was held which stood in favour of Afro-Asian unity.

Number of events i.e. Vietnam crisis and imperialistic role of USA in Vietnam, political crisis of Cambodia etc. led to the efforts for bringing unity among south-east nations.

The Association of South East Asian Nations, or ASEAN, was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the Founding Fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam then joined on 7 January 1984, Viet Nam on 28 July, 1995, Laos and Myanmar on 23 July, 1997, and Cambodia on 30 April, 1999, making up what is today the ten Member States of ASEAN.

Since the inception of ASEAN in 1967, India was keen to become its member. But two factors obstructed this wish of India- some members nations like Malaysia etc. were opposed to it and moreover Indian geography also served as a great obstacle. Hence Indo-ASEAN relations were not strong. Some other factors were also responsible for it. Western countries were trying to control the South-East nations. India was also not following the policy of free market economy. On the other side ASEAN countries were having inclination towards Soviet Union, China and United States of America. But still India

established bilateral and cultural relations with ASEAN. India tried to put forward the idea of Asian Brotherhood. But these relations were not basically economic relations.

The disintegration of Soviet Union and Change in the priorities of NAM were witnessed later on. Moreover Global Political System also witnessed drastic changes. Hence major changes in Indian Foreign Policy were also need of the hour. During the regime of P.V. Narsimha Rao (1991-1996) the first stage of "Look East Policy" (LEP) started. In the beginning India wanted to strengthen its ties with ASEAN countries. In other words it can be said that the policy of liberalization and globalisation influenced India Foreign Policy to follow the "Look East Policy". This policy aims towards giving preference to establish close and cordial relationship with South-East Asian Nations.

Fulfillment of economic interests became more important for India as it followed the policy of Globalisation in 1991. Therefore, India took new initiatives toward ASEAN. Positive response was given by ASEAN and it also showed its keen interest in promoting economic ties with India. In 1992 ASEAN gave to India the status of Sectoral Dialogue Partner. This status of India was converted into "Full Dialogue Partner" in 1995 at Bangkok Summit. Further, India was granted the membership of "ASEAN Regional Forum" in 1996.

In November, 2002 on the occasion of 8th Summit Conference of ASEAN at Pnom Penh, the first summit conference of Indo-ASEAN was also held. India was accorded equal status like ASEAN + 3 (Japan, China, Korea). After this ASEAN + 1 Summits were held where India is given place of Pride. Pnom Penh summit emphasized on trade relations and removal of terrorism.

When 11th Summit of ASEAN was held in 2005, first East Asia Summit-EAS was also held. This EAS summit was attended along with 10 members of ASEAN by India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. It was declared in this EAS summit that for the sake of peace, prosperity and stability of south East-Asia, the EAS will be

setup as a forum for promoting strategic, political and economic interests of the region.

In 2007 Indo-ASEAN meeting was held at CEBU (Philippines). Indian Prime Minister declared that after Free Trade Agreement (FTA) the trade relations will improve between the two sides. P.M. further declared that India-ASEAN will also follow the policy of Open Sky Policy. Its purpose will be to provide connectivity to promote regional economic integration.

In October 2009 Thailand was the venue of ASEAN summit and VII Indo-ASEAN conference. Two sides decided to accelerate process to sign agreement related to free, trade in investment and services. This was the need of time as the two sides had already signed free trade agreement related to commodities in August, 2009. This Trade Agreement had become operational in January, 2010 which further strengthened the economic and trade ties between Indo-ASEAN.

Beside LEP, India is also trying to improve its relationship with other Regional Economic Organisations i.e. Mekong Ganga Co-operation BIMSTEC (Boy of Bengal initiatives for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation), BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar), APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation), East Asia Summit and Asian Co-operation Dialogue etc. India aims to promote social and economic ties with all those organisations.

India is trying to improve its economic-trade and other Bilateral ties with Australia and New Zealand under the format of ASEAN + 2 and with China, Japan and South Korea under the format of ASEAN + 3.

On global issues India and ASEAN co-operates at various international platforms i.e. World Trade Organisation. They also support and raise common views on the issues of climate change. They also put up identical arguments to introduce democratic changes in U.N. and International Financial Institutions.

The main objective of India's LEP is to secure economic co-operation and integration with all regional economic organisations of Asia. Thus the real aim of India is to ensure unification of Asia so that South-South dialogue may be given a positive direction. India feels that, this way, the goal of establishing New International order (NIEO) may be achieved.

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