

**Talk by Ambassador Anil Wadhwa at the National Defence College (NDC) of Thailand on  
“Enhancing India’s Engagement with Thailand and South East Asia:  
Two Decades of India’s Look East Policy and the Way Forward”**

SawasDee Khrab and Good Morning. At the outset, I wish to thank Lt Gen Wasu, Deputy Commanding General of NDSI, Lt Gen Attanop Sirisak, the Superintendent of the National Defence College, for inviting me to this most prestigious institution of the Thai Armed Forces to deliver a talk. I understand that you have been gracious enough to make some changes in the course schedule so as to accommodate the talk.

2. I also extend my greetings to all the Thai students from the armed forces, police, civilian government officials, eminent executives from private and political sectors as well as officers from friendly foreign countries.

3. I would not be wrong in saying that I am probably the first Ambassador from my country who has had an opportunity to come to the NDC. It is indeed a great honour for me to be here amongst this august gathering of leaders from the military, the civil services and the corporate world to talk to you about a subject that is very close to my heart.

4. As I stand here today, I cannot help but think that the timing could not have been better. I am due to leave this beautiful country in the first week of January 2014, having spent over two extremely enjoyable, professionally enriching and satisfying years in Thailand. This tenure has not only allowed me to have a chance to get to know firsthand, Thailand and through Thailand the South East Asian Region, it has also given me the much needed knowledge, insight and appreciation to take into my next appointment as the Secretary East in the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi. There, I would be responsible among my other tasks, for coordinating India’s Look East Policy and taking it forward. So when I was asked to choose a topic for my talk today, I felt that there was probably no better topic than to talk about India’s Look East Policy and more importantly, the way forward as we move into the third decade of the Look East Policy.

5. India’s Look East policy has been in vogue since 1991. However, outside the policy circles and apart from the passing references in an odd newspaper article, not too much is known about it. Unlike the American “Asian Pivot” or the Chinese extensive and often well publicized economic engagement in the region, India’s Look East Policy has over a period of time quietly established itself as an important cog of India’s foreign policy and an important facet of its engagement with Thailand and ASEAN. As a consequence of this policy, India has built solid partnerships in the region, bilaterally and with ASEAN as a whole. Given that together, India and South East Asia constitute a community of 1.8 billion people, representing one-fourth of humanity, with a combined GDP of 3.8 trillion US \$, it is only natural that India attaches the highest priority to its relationship with ASEAN and with Thailand.

6. In the next 40 minutes or so, I will be speaking to you about the two decades of India's Look East policy and the way forward. I will cover as to how our engagement has developed over the past two decades, look at the vast potential that India has to offer and see how we can enhance our engagement and partnership and take it to the next level. I will also touch upon the security issues and once I conclude if you have any questions I shall be happy to take them on.

### **INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH ASEAN**

7. Two decades ago, India embarked upon a journey of openness and global economic integration. As we looked towards the East, ASEAN was the natural partner for our engagement in the Asia Pacific region. The partnership with ASEAN countries, in fact, constitutes the core of India's Look East Policy. Announced in 1991, it has over the years, expanded to cover not just ASEAN but Japan, Korea and even Pacific. We celebrated 20 years of this enhanced partnership last year with a special commemorative summit in New Delhi in which ASEAN, heads of States and Governments participated. A blueprint for a strategic partnership between India and ASEAN has now been laid down.

8. Improving connectivity, promoting cooperation among our institutions and deepening linkages between our people has been the unique defining feature of the Look East Policy. The elevation of our partnership to a strategic level in December 2012 came in the wake of significant progress during the last two years in India-ASEAN Plan of Action for 2010-2015 under all the three pillars of political and security cooperation, economic integration and socio-cultural exchanges. India's relationship with ASEAN members and with ASEAN institutionally continues to grow in all dimensions.

9. Economic and commercial engagement between India and ASEAN has seen very impressive trade growth, 10 times in the 10 years, since we launched our Summit level partnership in 2002. The FTA on Trade in Goods signed in 2009 helped us to meet our trade target of 70 billion US \$ ahead of time when the trade turnover in 2012 reached 80 billion US \$. Conclusion of the legal scrubbing of the ASEAN-India Trade in Services and Investment Agreements and an early signature of these agreements would help in achieving our trade target of 100 billion US \$ by 2015. Two-way flows in investments have also grown rapidly to reach 43 billion US\$ over the past decade. As ASEAN investments into India have multiplied, ASEAN countries too have emerged as major destinations for Indian companies. From energy resources to farm products, from materials to machinery, and from electronics to information technology, Indian and ASEAN companies are forging new partnerships of trade and investment.

10. The breadth and intensity of India's engagement with South East Asia is unmatched by any of our other regional relationships. We have institutionalized annual summits; many of our sectoral dialogues have been elevated into ministerial consultations; and nearly 25 mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation between India and ASEAN cover virtually every field of human endeavor. Last year, we saw an intensive engagement across Governments and meetings or programmes between experts, think tanks, private sectors, academia, diplomats, farmers, students, media and, in fact, across professions and ages at the people-to-people levels. We intensified the dialogue in agriculture, trade, tourism, new & renewable energy and environment. We began a

dialogue on cooperation in the vital Small and Medium Enterprises sector, which is considered as engine of employment and innovation in our countries. We need to build on commendable initiatives like the annual Business Fair and Conclave and energize our Business Council and parliamentary exchanges. The Delhi Dialogue has emerged as a successful Track 1.5 venue for discussions between representatives of government, Track II experts and business representatives on political, economic and security issues of interest to both India and ASEAN.

11. The India-ASEAN engagement began with a strong economic emphasis, but it has also become increasingly strategic in its content. Our political dialogue has grown, our consultations in regional forums have intensified, and our defence and counter-terrorism cooperation have expanded. Naturally, this partnership is important because our histories are intertwined. Equally, our future is inter-linked and a stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region is crucial for our own progress and prosperity. There is, therefore, mutual benefit in these aspects of our engagement. India remains convinced of the continuing relevance of the ASEAN-India strategic partnership as an anchor for peace, stability and prosperity in the region as also globally. There is a mutually beneficial synergy in our partnership. We continue to see the relevance of ASEAN centrality to our regional fora such as the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum.

12. Connectivity with ASEAN in all its dimensions – physical, institutional and people-to-people – continues to be a strategic priority for India. Last year, the India-ASEAN Car Rally – which travelled 8000 kms in 9 countries in 22 days - celebrated a remarkable journey by brave men and women, but also symbolized how connectivity can link people, stimulate trade and generate prosperity across the region. Similarly, the Indian Naval Ship INS Sudarshini, which was on a six-month expedition with 13 ports of call in nine ASEAN countries, not only drew attention to our maritime links, but to the economic potential of sea-based connectivity.

13. The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project is progressing well. We are nearing completion of the Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo sector of the Trilateral Highway. Repairs to 71 bridges on this road and work on upgrading a 120 km sector between Kalewa and Yargyi are to begin soon. India is working closely with Thailand and Myanmar to ensure that this project is completed by 2016. Route alignments for extending this Highway to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam need to be pursued further. The Mekong-India Economic Corridor, which will connect the industrial and freight corridors in India with the production networks in the Mekong region through the Chennai-Dawei sea link and the land connectivity to India's Northeast, will have a beneficial effect on all our economies.

14. We have initiated the annual ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee (ACCC)-India Meeting, to facilitate coordination and policy decisions on connectivity issues. This meeting discussed, inter alia, the idea of a possible maritime transport route linking India, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Viet Nam and has suggested the setting up of a Joint Working Group on Maritime Connectivity to explore linkages to complement the ASEAN Roll-On/Roll-Off Shipping Network. The Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia has suggested the utility of a Mekong India Economic Corridor and we need to look at providing incentives, including setting up of SEZs to attract private sectors to invest in these connectivity corridors. A satellite tracking

and data reception centre and imaging facility station is being set up by India in Vietnam for space application projects between India and ASEAN.

### **INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH THAILAND**

15. India's excellent relations with Thailand are an important and integral component of our overall relations with ASEAN. India's bilateral relations with Thailand are rooted in history, age-old social and cultural interactions and extensive people to people contacts. The shared link of Buddhism is reflected in regular pilgrimages to places of Buddhist interest in India by a large number of Thai people. Hindu elements can be found among those reflected in Thai architecture, arts, sculpture, dance, drama and literature. The Thai language incorporates Pali and Sanskrit influences. Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's visit to India as Chief Guest for our Republic Day in 2012 and the very successful visit of our Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to Thailand in May 2013 has given a new dynamism to our ties. The Prime Minister of India presented a sapling of the Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya as a special gift to the His Majesty King of Thailand as a symbol of the shared cultural heritage between the two countries.

16. India and Thailand celebrated 65 years of their diplomatic relations in 2012. In the past two decades, with regular political exchanges, growing trade and investment, India's ties with Thailand have now evolved into a comprehensive partnership. India's 'Look East' policy has been complemented by Thailand's 'Look West' policy in bringing the two countries closer. Both countries are important regional partners linking South and Southeast Asia and cooperate closely in the ASEAN, East Asia Summit (EAS) and BIMSTEC groupings as also Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD).

17. Over the past few years, sustained high level interaction has provided significant fillip to bilateral relations. During 2013 alone, from India, Minister of Defence, Minister of State for Development of North Eastern Region and Parliamentary Affairs, Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Minister of Water Resources and Minister of State for Commerce & Industry visited Thailand. From Thailand, Deputy Prime Minister & Finance Minister, Minister of Industry and Minister of Science & Technology visited India during the same period.

18. Although India and Thailand have strong economic synergies, our trade and investment levels are yet to reach their full potential. Bilateral trade has increased manifold over the past decade to reach nearly US\$ 9 billion in the past year. The diversifying profile of our bilateral trade reflects the growth and maturity of our two economies. A comprehensive Free Trade Agreement on goods, services and investments, currently under negotiation and to be concluded soon, is envisaged to bring about greater benefits to both countries.

19. India would like to see enhanced presence of Indian and Thai companies in each other's markets, especially as both countries are planning massive investments in infrastructure over the next five years. We welcome participation of the Thai private sector in India's plans to modernize and upgrade manufacturing and infrastructure sectors, especially in Delhi-Mumbai and Chennai-Bangalore Industrial Corridors, the Buddhist circuit and the North-East States of India. We

especially welcome Thai partnerships in Electronics, food processing, Power Plants, alternate energy and low cost housing and the retail business.

20. Thailand has invited the Indian business sector to invest in the Dawei Special Economic Zone, especially in the areas where Indian companies have expertise, such as steel, manufacturing, power, petrochemicals, services and others. Thailand welcomed India's invitation to organize a road show in India in this respect later this year. We have recently also signed agreements with GISTDA of Thailand for urban mapping using space technologies and developing an archaeological atlas of Buddhist sites.

21. The air connectivity between India and Thailand is growing with over 150 flights per week, reflecting rapidly growing passenger traffic between the two countries. Bangkok is connected by air to 9 Indian destinations. With over one million Indian tourists visiting Thailand, India has emerged as one of the fastest growing tourist markets for Thailand. India and Thailand are cooperating closely on improving regional connectivity through initiatives such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral Highway, Asian Highway Network and BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure Logistics Study (BTILS).

22. Substantial cultural exchanges also take place under the framework of a Cultural Exchange Programme between the two governments. An Indian Cultural centre was opened in Bangkok in September 2009. A MoU on Cooperation in the field of Education was signed in 2005. Government of India offers 130 scholarships to Thai students under its ITEC and ICCR sponsored schemes annually. A large number of Thai students are also studying on self-financing basis. Ministry of Human Resource Development provides for secondment of 8 professors every semester for the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Bangkok. Government of India contributed Thai Baht 10 million in 2008 towards construction of a new building for the Sanskrit Studies Centre at Silpakorn University and has deputed a Sanskrit professor. An India Studies Centre is functioning at the Thammasat University of Bangkok since April 1993. In 2008, the Mahidol University of Bangkok started a Masters of Arts course on Indian studies. A Chair in Chulalongkorn University's India Study Centre was inaugurated by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn in March 2012. MOU between Indian Council for Cultural Relations and Thammasat University on the establishment of the ICCR Hindi Chair of Indian Studies at the Thammasat University was signed during Prime Minister's visit in May 2013. This Chair is offering a Bachelor of Arts programme in Indian Studies for the first time in Thailand.

23. On the defence and security front our cooperation has been growing from strength to strength. We have regular exchange of delegations between our armed forces. A number of Indian Armed Forces officers undergo various staff and command training courses in Thailand and a number of Thai officers undergo staff and other training courses at Indian training establishments. The navies of the two countries carry out regular exercises, joint patrols and ship visits to each other's ports. We have an annual exercise between the Indian Army and the Royal Thai Army. Our air forces operate a number of common systems and are moving towards carrying out joint exercises, sometimes in the near future.

## INDIA

24. Before we look at the future potential of our relationship, it is important to know the capabilities of both the stakeholders India and ASEAN, so as to understand their potential, strengths, synergies and what they can bring to the table. While you are well aware of Thailand's and ASEANs potential, let me cover a few things about India. The reason is that while a lot is known about India not many understand this country of rich diversities and technological prowess. This country of the Mahatma and the Mission to Mars. This country of 1.2 billion people and a million ideas.

25. India is one of the oldest civilizations, but a very young nation. We attained independence from colonial rule in 1947. The ideals and the values that guided our freedom movement, led by Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi also became the cornerstone of the Indian Republic. The preamble of our Constitution describes India as a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic. These are the core values of the modern Indian nation.

26. As you are aware, India is the world's largest democracy. Democracy ensures that India remains an inclusive nation where every individual has a right to participate in governance as a matter of right. Our general elections are a unique exercise in itself, as the logistical arrangements required are mind-boggling. More than 700 million people exercise their right to vote. These require more than 800,000 polling stations and the use of nearly 1.4 million Electronic Voting Machines that have been developed within India. Elections are supervised by more than 5.5 million officials. Incidentally, the next general elections are due in six months.

27. Our democracy is supported by an enlightened judiciary that enforces rule of law, and a vigorous and vigilant media. Media in India is huge. With 70,000 newspapers and 100 million copies printed daily, it is the world's largest newspaper market. Media ensures that organs of government are on their toes, and perform their duties. We unsparingly analyze ourselves in fine traditions of what Noble Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen calls "the argumentative Indian". I see this ability to scrutinize ourselves in full public gaze as one of the strengths of our democracy.

28. One writer has described India as the 'cross-roads of culture', as it has been the intersection point of both major land and sea routes. As a result, throughout the history, India has influenced – and in turn been influenced - by other cultures. We have 22 major languages – each with linguistic traditions, history, script and grammar of its own - that are recognized by the Constitution of India. There are 844 different dialects that are practiced in various parts of the country. An Indian currency note reflects this diversity – you can find no less than 17 languages on it. It is therefore natural that pluralism is deeply entrenched in Indian civilization and is a source of our strength. Not surprisingly, the average Indian considers engagement with the world a familiar activity. We are comfortable with other cultures and remarkably adaptable to different environments.

29. Religion is an important, though only one of many, components of India's cultural landscape and identity. As you know, India is the birthplace of some of the great religions of the world – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, to name just a few. But what is truly

remarkable is that it has been home to every major religion of the world since long. For example, Christianity in India is almost as old as Christianity itself. It spread in India even before it spread in many of today's predominantly Christian nations of Europe.

30. I have spoken about the core values of democracy and respect for diversity, pluralism and tolerance that India has always stood for. Since these are universal values for the world, it is but natural that these give us an innate, natural strength when we deal with the world.

31. Though a large population creates considerable pressure on resources, there is no doubt that our people are our strength and our real resources to achieve rapid development. India is a young nation, with more than 50% of our people being younger than 25 years. Even by 2020, the average age in India would be only 29 years, as compared to 37 years in the US and China, 45 in West Europe, and 48 in Japan. With proper training, the economy is assured of a continuous supply of productive and competitive work force. The Indian economy, which is the world's third largest economy by purchasing power parity, slowed down in recent past due to its increasing integration with the world economy. However, thanks to its innate resilience, derived from a strong domestic consumption base and stringent regulatory mechanisms, the impact has been moderate, and an early recovery is in sight. To put the growth back on track, Government has undertaken many bold policy reforms recently, such as opening up of the retail sector and aviation to FDI, and insurance and pension reforms.

32. Though raising the standards of living for a large number of people remains a key issue, meaningful strides have been taken in meeting the challenge. An immense achievement has been complete self sufficiency in food production thanks to the Green Revolution. As a result of our own R&D efforts, India produces not only enough food for its own large population, but also exports a large amount over the past few years to help achieve food security across the world. India is the largest producer of milk and second largest producer of fruits and vegetables. We now want help of Thai companies to process part of the foodstuff that we produce.

33. In our quest for rapid growth, technology has been a great help. Many of you would have heard of the ICT skills that India has developed. The Indian IT and biotech companies in cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad are some of the best in the world. Most of the world's Fortune 500 companies have their development centers in India that undertake cutting edge innovation.

34. Technology has actually helped us to leapfrog certain stages of development. For example, with nearly 800 million mobile phones, India has one of the world's largest mobile phone networks. This has allowed unprecedented connectivity to the remotest part of the country. Technology has also enabled us to develop the world's largest biometric database to create a national Unique ID called AADHAR. It has enrolled more than 350 million Indians in less than three years. In a revolutionary step, this Unique ID scheme is going to be used for direct cash transfers to beneficiaries under various government welfare schemes. In one fell swoop, technology will ensure that the benefits of the welfare schemes worth hundreds of billions of dollars reach quickly and directly to the target people.

35. India has embraced technology to develop a comprehensive space programme resolutely dedicated to development. India today has the world's largest network of remote sensing satellites in the world and our satellite launch vehicle, having done more than hundred successful space launches, has placed as many as 10 satellites in the orbit at one go. Recently we launched first of our navigation satellites in a seven satellite network that will provide a regional "GPS" of our own. More recently, the Mission to Mars aims at sending the 'Mangalyaan' satellite into Martian orbit for scientific exploration. The benefits of our space programme that accrue from its low cost are available to all our partners.

36. While India is one of the largest importers of weapons and military equipment in the world, it has embarked on an ambitious programme of indigenizing and manufacturing defence equipment in India. We already have a robust ship building industry. The recent launch of the indigenously built aircraft carrier and the commissioning of the nuclear submarine are pointers that underline India's growing capability in this field. The soon to be operational Light Combat Aircraft and the successful Dhruv helicopter are important projects in the aviation sector. The small arms production capability of our ordnance factories is steadily improving in quality and in its cost effectiveness. I am confident that in the near future, India would be a cost effective source of high end, high tech military hardware.

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

37. As we have seen, capacity building, development, economic growth and peace and stability have been the characteristics of the ASEAN-India partnership. The numerous projects under finalization as per the Plan of Action for 2010-2015 are set to bring a qualitative enhancement in our partnership. From agriculture to space cooperation, from English language and entrepreneurship development training to capacity building in renewable energy and environment protection, from encouraging SMEs to strengthening our trade and investment linkages, we have now a comprehensive engagement between ASEAN and India.

38. And yet, there is still tremendous untapped potential in the ASEAN-India partnership. There are also areas such as the new non-traditional threats to our socio-economic and political systems that need effective redressal. We are looking for ways to combat the fast evolving threat from terrorism and to counter drug trafficking, both of which incrementally threaten the future of our younger generations. We need to add form and substance on the ground to our existing geographic and civilizational connectivity, and to extend it simultaneously towards an integrated and sustainable economic prosperity.

39. A future of peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia Pacific requires increased cooperation and integration in the region. ASEAN has shown the way in this regard. We support the objectives of an ASEAN Community by 2015, the Initiative for ASEAN Integration and the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity. ASEAN's leadership in fostering cooperation and building better understanding in the larger Asia Pacific community is admirable.

40. India is happy to note the progress amongst the ASEAN countries in integrative processes towards the ASEAN Community by 2015. We would like to emphasize that as ASEAN countries integrate amongst themselves, the process of integration with India should also move apace, whether on facilitating our people-to-people linkages, our institutional and trade complementarity or our geographical connectivity. We would like to engage with ASEAN as to how India can contribute further to the processes towards the ASEAN Community. As the deadline for ASEAN Community by 2015 approaches, India has renewed its commitment to support ASEAN's community building efforts, including the Initiative for ASEAN Integration Work Plan II, Narrowing Development Gaps and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity.

41. In our support for the ASEAN Community by 2015, we are continuing with the process of building capacity through the Entrepreneurship Development Centres and Centers for English Language and Training in CLMV countries, apart from offering more than 1100 scholarships to ASEAN countries under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme.

42. Some of the future projects are setting up of four IT Centres in CMLV and an IT Resource Centre in India by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing; Establishment of Tracking and Data Reception Station & Data Processing Facility for ASEAN in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam; Upgradation of the Biak II Telemetry Tracking & Command Station in Indonesia; and Training of ASEAN Personnel in Space Science and Technology, taking further the process of finalization on the project for cooperation on Bio-diversity between the ASEAN Centre for Bio-diversity and National Bio-diversity Authority of India.

43. In this digital age, we also need think of virtual networks as a way forward for connecting the region. We have welcomed the ASEAN Information and Communications Technology Master Plan 2015 and also the efforts to strengthen ASEAN-India Connectivity in ICT. As a beginning, we are exploring capacity building programmes and sharing best practices in technological development and policy regulations related to e-connectivity.

44. We need to address issues relating to enhancement of tourism cooperation between ASEAN and India. I find the Indian tourists see the value for money in tourist destinations in ASEAN and I would like to see a similar perception increase tourist inflows into India from the ASEAN countries. Government of India is internally discussing the feasibility of providing a link from ASEAN to the Buddhist sites in India to facilitate tourist arrivals from ASEAN. Continuing liberalization of our visa regime for ASEAN countries is also inspired by the same desire to connect our people and expand mutually beneficial economic opportunities. The ASEAN-India Centre, which has been established in New Delhi recently, will serve as a resource in implementing connectivity projects. These are welcome steps in implementing the vision of India-ASEAN connectivity.

45. We share common challenges of energy and food security, rapid urbanization, climate change, the empowerment of people through education and skill development. We should use the opportunities available to work together in addressing these. We are expanding our support for innovative mechanisms like the ASEAN-India Fund, the ASEAN-India Green Fund and the ASEAN-India Science & Technology Fund to take our cooperation forward in diverse fields.

Development of effective energy systems, ensuring energy access utilizing all forms of energy to all the sections of population, promotion of energy efficiency technologies and use of renewable energy should see urgent prioritization on our cooperative calendar.

46. So as to ensure that the initiatives that I have covered are given the correct impetus, India will soon set up a separate Mission to the ASEAN in Jakarta with a full time resident Ambassador.

### **THE SECURITY PERSPECTIVE**

47. Coming to defence and security, India's presence in the region is seen as a stabilising one. As an expert remarked once, India is a net manufacturer of peace and stability and not its consumer. The Indian Navy, for example, coordinates closely with the other navies of the region, including the Royal Thai Navy, in areas such as anti-piracy and disaster management and enhancing maritime security. We are fully engaged in working towards a collaborative, inclusive and open security architecture in the region through mechanisms such as ARF, ADMM plus and the East Asia Summit.

48. The Indian Armed Forces, one of the largest in the world, are a true reflection of India's diversity and multi-cultural and democratic values. India's professional, apolitical and highly trained Armed Forces have seen the entire spectrum of operations from conventional wars to low intensity conflicts, from counterinsurgency operations to UN peacekeeping missions. Its experience in Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief missions is also noteworthy. The Indian Armed Forces also boast of some of the best training institutions in the world. This coupled with the size of the armed forces and India's benign and non-interventionist policies make other nations relatively open and comfortable in dealing with India.

49. As the global power dynamics see further shift towards Asia, it is important to understand the dynamics within the Indian Ocean and the Pacific and work towards a security construct that leverages the civilizational linkages to expand cooperation and build partnership across the Indo-Pacific. Political, economic and security structures are evolving globally, and, in a more pronounced manner, in East Asia. ASEAN and India are and will remain natural partners in defining their perspectives and addressing their common requirements of economic growth and prosperity. India and ASEAN member countries share a vision of a peaceful, prosperous and resurgent Asia, which contributes to global peace and security.

50. The growing role and responsibilities of ASEAN and India in global affairs also call for increased consultation on a broader range of international developments. As maritime nations, India and ASEAN nations should intensify their engagement for maritime security and safety, for freedom of navigation and for peaceful settlement of maritime disputes in accordance with international law. Considering the vast area involved and the enormous resources required, while the Indian Navy is in the process of acquiring the requisite capabilities, a cooperative and supportive approach is required. There is a need to promote regional security, in concert with other stake holders. The Indian Navy's strategy for maritime diplomacy and security cooperation in the region includes coordinated patrols and exercises like MILAN.

51. One area where we can enhance our cooperation exponentially is in the field of defence production. As countries in the region look at diversifying their military procurement, India stands out as a potential source of defence technology and manufacturing capacity. In addition, India's close geographical proximity, which would be further enhanced by the tri-lateral highway, offers obvious advantages in terms of after sales support and servicing.

52. Post the tsunami of December 2005, there is a great emphasis in the region towards enhancing cooperation and building capabilities to handle large scale environmental disasters. There is also an understanding of the fact that the armed forces need to be integrated in the overall disaster management plans as in most cases they are the first responders and invariably have the resources in terms of manpower and equipment to deal with such disasters. The recent destruction caused in Philippines by super Cyclone Haiyan and the subsequent rescue and relief efforts mounted by the armed forces of various countries, including that of India, is a good example. Disasters like these are bound to occur in future. India, due to its proximity to the region and the Indian military and disaster relief agencies, with their vast resources, capabilities and experience are ideally positioned to provide such assistance.

53. International terrorism, transnational organized crime, money laundering, drug-trafficking, information and cyber security issues are today demanding greater collaboration of effort by the international community. With repercussions for global and regional security, these issues require new, innovative solutions that can remain ahead of the growing complexity in these issues. Brainstorming and finding synergy of interest and effort in these areas is all the more important when we consider the global economic situation.

54. Over the last few years, our region has seen a multiplicity of stakeholders and a fraternity of purpose for tackling common challenges. We need to build an architecture that contributes to the geo-strategic importance of the region to global processes and, most importantly, secures economic growth and prosperity for the people in our countries. This is the strength of the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership as an anchor of stability from the western confines of the Indian Ocean to the shores of the Pacific, from the Straits of Hormuz to the Straits of Malacca.

## **CONCLUSION**

55. Ladies and Gentlemen, we see Thailand as a springboard for India's engagement with South East and East Asia and it remains a vital link in our strategic partnership with ASEAN. We see our partnership with ASEAN not merely as a reaffirmation of ties with neighboring countries or as an instrument of economic development, but also as an integral part of our vision of a stable, secure and prosperous Asia and its surrounding Indian Ocean and Pacific regions. This is a time of great flux and transition, with several unsettled questions and unresolved issues in our region. Our responsibility to work for peace has increased and become more urgent. Our shared values, convergent world views and similarities in approaches to the region should help us further strengthen the India-ASEAN Strategic Partnership for the next decade and beyond. The Vision Statement announced during the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in New Delhi imposes

on us the responsibility to work diligently and innovatively to fulfill the heightened expectations from this engagement.

56. It has been my endeavor today, to give you a brief insight into India's Look East Policy and the initiatives that are being taken to take it to the next level. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been termed by many as the 'Asian Century'. It is my firm belief that the growing relationship between ASEAN and India would go a long way in realising this. As the future leaders in your respective fields, I am sure that sometimes in the future, many of you would be involved in taking decisions that are going to take this relationship forward. I hope that today's talk has given you a broad insight into the subject.

57. Finally, I would once again like to thank the Deputy Commanding General of NDSI and the Superintendent of NDC for giving me this opportunity to speak to you and to all the faculty, staff and students of NDC for your undivided attention. I have finished. If you have any questions I shall be happy to take them on.

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