

INDIAN FACTOR IN ASEAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN*

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Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is regional alliance of Eight independent countries of Southeast Asia. It was founded in Bangkok in August 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand. Brunei joined after attaining independence in 1984. Vietnam was admitted as the first communist member in 1995 and this year Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos) will also join this forum on its 30th anniversary to achieve the vision of a Union of all 10 Southeast Asian states in ASEAN. But due to recent political turmoil in Cambodia-coup against first prime minister Norodom Ranariddh by second prime minister Hun Sen, may delay the entry of Cambodia expected to be granted on 23rd July, 1997 in the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN to be held at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

ASEAN was originally established as a defence against the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. Its major objectives, outlined in the Bangkok Declaration (1967), to accelerate economic growth and promote regional peace and stability. A joint forum with Japan was established in 1977, and a co-operation agreement with the European Community was also signed in 1980 to develop socio-economic relations. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, ASEAN played an important role in mediating the civil war in Cambodia. "In January 1992 ASEAN members agreed to establish a free-trade area and to cut tariffs on non-agricultural goods over a 15-year period beginning in 1993"² (subsequently agreed to cut tariffs in 10 years period-by 2003).

The East Asia region was the battlefield of the cold war, where superpower interests collided and competed. Following the

This paper was presented by Prof. Iqbal Ahmed Qureshi, in the Seminar held on July 6, 1997 at Murree under Chairmanship of Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Adviser to Prime Minister of Pakistan on Information, Culture and Tourism, in connection with Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Pakistan.

revolutionary changes in the Soviet Union and the ensuing changes in the East Asian power balance, economic and trade issues have become matter of dominant urgency. Interdependency among the nations of the region has grown as members attempt to sustain their development and prosperity. New economic tensions are emerging, particularly between the larger economic powers such as the United States, Japan and China.

Considering the changing geo-political and economic situation of the world, ASEAN must constantly adjust itself and evolve so that it can meet the ever-increasing challenges of the new world order. While this organisation cannot expect to solve all discord and frictions among individual interests in the region, it can provide an important framework within which systematic discussions and consultations can enlighten the hang up debates, leading to possible solutions.³ There are high expectations that Cambodian crisis would soon be tackled amicably by ASEAN members and Cambodia will be granted full membership as soon as political situation is normalised. Similarly, ASEAN members can also be of great help to Pakistan and India in resolving their conflicts in near future.

Three major wars have been fought between India and Pakistan ever since their independence in 1947. Their troubled relationship remain one of Asia's most dangerous flash point. The suspended dialogue between India and Pakistan since 1993 resumed this year in March and June. Presently India is facing major political uncertainties in terms of their coalition government, whereas Pakistan is out of political turmoil as Mr. Nawaz Sharif is comfortably installed as Prime Minister, having constitutionally removed the threat of summary dismissal power of the President, by curtailing his absolute powers through unanimously agreed 13th amendment.

The Foreign Secretary level talks between India and Pakistan in Islamabad in June this year created hopes for normalisation of relations in future. The main object, to some extent, Pakistan has achieved by tabling the Kashmir issue, which India has agreed to discuss and bring it on the agenda of the next meeting proposed to be held in India by end of this year. Both sides have agreed to continue dialogue on all outstanding issues, including Kashmir, and to prevent hostile propaganda and provocative actions against each

other. The collapse of bi-polar system has been of great significance for reshaping policy purposes. At that time India was allied with Soviet Union and United States supported Pakistan, reinforcing the neighbour's historical rivalry and to block the Russian influence. Now there seems no immediate threat to India and Pakistan from the super powers competition. Beijing and Washington are taking interest to encourage harmony between these two rival countries with reservations on nuclear capabilities. The Chinese President Jiang Zemin during his tour to South Asia in December last urged the region's nations to set aside disputes for the time-being and concentrate on development and co-operation.

The economic pressures and new found pragmatism compelled India and Pakistan to dialogue face to face. Both the premiers have focused on mending fences, fully aware that there is much to gain. "Pakistan's military expenditures are nearly 26% of its annual budget, and spends \$26 per capita on defense and \$10 on health and education, against Indian outlet of \$10 and \$14 respectively."⁴ According to a recent United Nations report, more children go to bed hungry in South Asia than anywhere else in the world.

Another benefit of reducing tensions would be more opportunities for development. In many ways, the economic of India and Pakistan complement each other. The Pakistan has a sufficient energy resources, notable huge untapped reserves of natural gas, coal and oil. India, on the other hand, is tremendously hungry for energy. Trade has also expanded, it now stands at 111.4 million dollars. Pakistan imports 90,000 tons of tea every year, and only 5,000 tons come from India, although it sells quality leaves more cheaply purchased from Kenya and Indonesia. Similar arguments apply for items like sugar and wheat, produced in quantity by India, which Pakistan needs.

The end of the Cold War has undoubtedly improved the security environment of the Asia. The continued rapid economic growth in East Asia has had both security-enhancing and security-undermining effects within and between regional states. "The rapid military build-up in the region which economic growth has facilitated is of no great consequence at the moment, but the increased offensive reach of regional states with newly acquired weapons systems could

be the destabilising factor and may deteriorate political relationships between Asian states"⁶ - especially India and Pakistan. There is, therefore, a clear need for greater attention to non-military approaches to enhance security matters-from confidence building to conflict resolution. It may also lead to reduction in tensions between the two countries and facilitate a negotiated mutual reductions in military expenditures resulting in peace dividends for these two impoverished countries.

Apart from the religious barrier both the countries have common heritage-culture, traditions and language, for example Hindi-Urdu is a common language spoken and understood freely in India and Pakistan, which can bring both the people closer with each other. But unfortunately the hands of history lies heavy over the sub-continent. Both India and Pakistan can do well to take a leaf from East Asia's experience particularly from ASEAN platform. That is to make economic development the "top national priority". Kashmir is not likely to be resolved soon, but negotiators should start cutting deals on smaller issues, especially those that encourage trade and investment so that trust building process may bring the well-being of the people of sub-continent.

One clear pattern in India's foreign policy in the past three years has been to improve its relations with Pakistan's neighbours notably China and Iran. The political turbulence in Pakistan provided India with an opportunity to advance this goal. Former Prime Minister Narasima Rao's visit to China in September, 1993 paved the way for improvement in political understanding and economic corporation between these two countries. Border tensions have been eased, enabling India to scale down military build-up on the Sino-Indian boarder. On other points of friction particularly on Tibet and also on Kashmir they have softened their respective positions, to great extent, leading to an improved atmosphere in Sino-India relations.

India, before its admission in 1996, had prepared a strong case for securing its Full Dialogue Partnership in ASEAN. India vigorously pursued his case, both at technical and political level and held number of seminars and proper studies involving experts from

India as well as ASEAN. Their vigorous lobbying resulted in an active support from Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore for securing membership in ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Pakistan's inclusion in this forum has not yet been accepted. Many of the members especially Malaysia and Indonesia have assured to support the case of Pakistan for membership in ARF in its next meeting of ASEAN to be held in 1998.

Considering the deep penetration of India in socio-political and economical arena of South East Asian states, Pakistan's foreign service must work hard to evolve strategy to upgrade its position from Sectoral Dialogue Partner (which was granted in July, 1993) to Full Dialogue Partnership leading to occupy full membership of ASEAN. For this, Pakistan's trade and investment with ASEAN countries must be raised to a reasonable percentage so that favourable conditions may be developed to get the support from friendly countries of ASEAN-particularly Malaysia and Indonesia. At present Pakistan's trade with ASEAN is about 7% of the total ASEAN trade and investment is even less than 1% which is unsatisfactory to pursue Pakistan's case for Full Dialogue Partnership."⁷

IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In the meantime, the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union has ended in world politics, and "the world economy has become more integrated than ever before, with capital, labour, and technology freely moving beyond national borders, stimulated by advanced information technologies and economic liberalisation."⁸

ASEAN holds a unique position in the world as a successful model, achieving both political stability and economic growth. ASEAN's active diplomatic initiative have produced spectacular achievements. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is making steady progress as a multilateral security framework contributing to regional stability, and in addition of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC), the Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) has been launched as an important undertaking to strengthen relations between Asia and Europe.

India's strong position in ASEAN, ARF and Asia-Pacific region may be a matter of great concern for Pakistan in terms of the development in socio-political and trade relations with this part of the world, and may also shake the balance of power in the subcontinent. Consequently, India may occupy the dominating position in entire South Asia.

Another important implication would be that India may get better and commanding position to lobby for acquiring permanent membership of the Security Council. By the presence in ASEAN and ARF it may influence many of the Asia Pacific countries to support her case at United Nations-that means India may emerge with veto power in future (USA has also recently proposed to enlarge the composition of this most important organisation of UN).

In other words, Pakistan's position will be completely weakened at international forums and thereby Kashmir case will be adversely effected, and then may be tackled on the terms of Indian point of view. Possibly many of the countries of Asia, Europe and North America may put pressure to address the Kashmir issue on Indian motivated plan. The long time friends Iran and China, to some extent, have also softened their position on this issue, which is very alarming.

Therefore, Pakistan must concentrate and evolve effective strategies to counter the increasing influence of Indians in Asia Pacific region. In the first instance Pakistan should mobilise its all resources and energies to uplift its economy and raise the level of investment and trade with ASEAN and other countries of the world. As soon as economic prosperity is arrived, political stability will then easily be achieved, and there will be very little to be the prey of international intrigues to destabilise Pakistan.

In my opinion, there is still great room for Pakistan to penetrate in Asia Pacific region to develop its influence especially in Australia and New Zealand, which have effective role and say in Asia Pacific and Euro-American countries, and our vigorous lobby in this context may be of great assistance to enhance Pakistan's image and political economy in the fast moving world. If Pakistan do not accelerate its diplomatic pace, there would be very likely-hood that India may again take the lead to push Pakistan behind the scene.

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