

Remarks by H.E. Dr. SOK Siphana
Advisor to the Royal Government of Cambodia
at Delhi Dialogue IX
“Charting the course for India-ASEAN relations for the Next 25 Years”
Panel Discussion : Waters of Asia: Cultural, Social and Political Ties
4 July 2017, New Delhi, India

Honorable Gen. (Dr.) V.K. Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs of the Republic of India
Excellencies Heads of Delegation from ASEAN Countries,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. At the outset, let me extend the warmest greetings from my Foreign Minister, **H.E. PRAK Sokhonn**, who is unable to attend today's event due to his prior engagement in the Capital. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the Government of the Republic of India, especially the Ministry of External Affairs of India for the excellent arrangements and warm hospitality accorded to me and my delegation during our stay in New Delhi. On behalf of my Government, I would like to reiterate the importance of the Delhi Dialogue, which for the past eight years has served as an effective platform for experts and think-tanks to discuss and exchange views on a range of issues pertaining to ASEAN-India relations, and in the process has contributed significantly to the advancement of ASEAN-India Dialogue. Personally, it is indeed my great honor and pleasure to attend this important forum for the third time and to meet so many friends and colleagues from ASEAN Member States and India.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. This year's theme of **“Charting the course of ASEAN-India relations in the next 25 years”** is somehow very appropriate and visionary. As ASEAN celebrates this year our own 50th Anniversary golden jubilee, ASEAN and India are also celebrating 25 years of our Dialogue Partnership, 15 years of our Summit Level interaction and 5 years of our Strategic Partnership.

3. We have done a lot in the past, which gives us a lot to build upon. I recall vividly my works in the **ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group** in 2012, which contains many bold and practical recommendations on future cooperation between ASEAN and India in the areas of political and security cooperation, sustainable economic development, socio-cultural development and connectivity. I am pleased to note that key recommendations in the Report have been implemented by the Governments of the ASEAN Member States and India, namely the **upgrading of ASEAN-India Partnership to a Strategic Partnership** and the **setting up of the ASEAN-India Centre** in India to promote trade, investment, tourism, and cultural exchanges, just to name a few.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. Let me now move to share my views in this panel discussion on **“Waters of Asia: Cultural, Social and Political Ties”**. When we speak of waters, both rivers and oceans come to mind. ASEAN countries and India, while essentially shaped by similar riverine cultures, share maritime and land boundaries. This proximity and connectivity are very conducive for developing all aspects of socio-political and economic cooperation, be they bilateral, plurilateral or multilateral. Given also our rich and long cultural and historical linkages, I see strong potentials in this ASEAN-India Partnership, the bulk of which, I stress, have yet to be tapped by both sides.

5. At the policy level, the commitment and direction are quite clear. India's **“Act East Policy”**, recently transformed from the **“Look East Policy”**, is a major step forward in the right direction as it seeks not only to revitalize the ASEAN-India Partnership but also to expand

India's role and engagement beyond the Southeast Asia region through South-Southeast Asia gateway. On the ASEAN side, the official establishment of the **ASEAN Community** last year, its new ambitious 10-year target towards the **ASEAN Community Vision 2025**, and its **Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity**, have highlighted that Connectivity is the cornerstone and the top priority of ASEAN Community building and ASEAN integration.

6. That said, to me the challenges are rarely at the policy level. In fact, it is usually at the implementation level. The devil is always in the details. The daunting question is more on how to translate those policy directions and recommendations into concrete projects and practical actions in an effective and timely manner? As the new geopolitical landscape keeps evolving in such a dynamic pace, how are we re-adjusting these policies to reflect the new realities, and how fast can we do it? We are all now living in the most interesting and the most unpredictable time. I can just list the main ones, like President Donald Trump's "**America First**" policy and his Administration's withdrawal from the **Paris Climate Accord** and its non-committal position on multilateral trade initiatives, the collapse of the TPP, the uncertainties of BREXIT, the rise of populism in politics whether in Europe, the United States and also in Asia, and more worrisome the Korean Peninsula's nuclear crisis.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. I am an optimistic by nature and I do not just see the dark side of the world we live in. Challenges always spark opportunities, for those who seek. There is always a silver lining somewhere for us to find. I tend to look for "**issues that bind rather those that divide**". And it is the case in our ASEAN-India relations. In our region of Asia, India retains its lead as the fastest growing major economy in the world with the World Bank projecting more than 7 per cent growth over the next few years. ASEAN's regional integration is gaining momentum and is firming up the region's position as a global growth centre. ASEAN's real GDP grew at a robust rate of 4.5% last year amidst increasingly challenging global conditions and is expected to accelerate to 4.8% this year.

8. Interregional trade and investment between ASEAN and India has expanded enormously in recent decades, even though ASEAN and India have not been able to achieve its target of total trade of **USD100 billion by 2015**. As a matter of fact, ASEAN-India total merchandise trade reached only USD 58.7 billion for 2015, accounting for 2.6 per cent of ASEAN's total trade and placing India as ASEAN's sixth largest trading partner. Meanwhile, FDI flows from India to ASEAN amounted to USD 1.3 billion, placing India as ASEAN's eighth largest source of FDI. With this statistics in mind, I believe this is a good moment to look for the cause of this shortcoming. Perhaps some experts attending this Delhi Dialogue could take on this analysis?

9. On a positive note, now that the ASEAN-India Trade in Services and Investment Agreement have entered into force on 1 July 2015, what else can we do to stimulate private sector involvement to ensure that we would not miss the new target of USD 200 billion by 2022 as set by our Leaders? How can we best utilize the USD1 billion Line of Credit provided by India to support the implementation of physical and digital connectivity for ASEAN? So far, the procedural sides have yet to established and well disseminated. How fast can we push to finalize and ratify the RCEP?

10. If we are to promote closer, greater and more effective maritime transport connectivity, we should work harder upstream to promote trade and investment links, bearing in mind that the bulk of ASEAN businesses are SMEs. As such how much efforts are we going to put to strengthen SME development and competitiveness, particularly for CLM countries? Here I see the clear functionality and relevance of the ASEAN-India Trade and Investment Centre (AITIC).

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. To get the new target of USD 200 billion by 2022, I see the true merit in advancing

more aggressively maritime transport cooperation between ASEAN and India; we should encourage and incentivize potential private sector participation in the development of seaports, maritime logistics network and maritime services in order to create greater efficient linkages. We should cooperate to promote, where appropriate, more types of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects in infrastructure development and financing modalities. Maritime connectivity should not be restricted to just ports, how about pipelines, fiber optic cable and telecommunications, information and communication technology?

12. On the water side, I mean literally the big ocean water expanse, we would need to work closely together to promote maritime security and safety, freedom of navigation to ensure an unimpeded flow of commerce; when disputes arise, and they will, countries should exercise self-restraint, refrain from the threat to use force, and ultimately seek to resolve their disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

13. As to maritime cooperation, including maritime security, counter piracy and search and rescue cooperation, I believe that there are existing appropriate ASEAN mechanisms, and ASEAN-led fora, such as the ASEAN-India framework, EAS, ARF, ADMM-Plus, ASEAN Maritime Forum and its Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, which we all can reach out to.

14. In closing, let me say that ASEAN and India have already in place a good mechanism for ASEAN-India Connectivity, which can enable them both to interact with each other in the most comprehensive way so that the multilateral cooperation between them continue to prosper for the generations to come.
