

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE BANQUET IN HONOUR OF THE HEADS OF STATE/GOVERNMENT WHO ATTENDED THE ASEAN-INDIA SPECIAL COMMEMORATIVE SUMMIT

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi : 20-12-2012

Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, H.E. Samdech HUN SEN,
Sultan of Brunei Darussalam, His Majesty Haji Hassanah Bolkiah,
Heads of State & Government of ASEAN Member States,
Vice President of India, Shri M. Hamid Ansari,
Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh,
Secretary General of ASEAN, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely happy to welcome you all on this occasion to celebrate the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit. This year the ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership has reached a significant milestone. In two decades of steady development, the ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership has matured into a Strategic Partnership. This, to my mind, is a natural coming of age. This is an auspicious occasion indeed as we embark into a new phase in our relationship - in which we will create an even more comprehensive partnership for peace and prosperity between our nations.

Excellencies, we, in India, perceive our partnership with ASEAN as a pact for growth and economic progress. We all have a shared vision of promoting peace and stability and we are united in our dream of a new Asia full of promise and opportunities. There will be challenges but we are confident of our ability to co-operate and address these collectively and successfully in the interest of our peoples.

Distinguished guests, the essence of the ASEAN and India partnership is that it facilitates and assists each partner country in strengthening its national programmes for sustainable economic and socio-cultural development and in contributing to the growing relevance of Asia globally. The Asia-Pacific region is today central to the global dialogue on political, economic and security issues. It is, therefore, natural that ASEAN and India, with their affinities and complementary capacities, come together for the definition of the new economic and security architecture in the region. We have joined the ASEAN in building strong foundations for this – as a Sectoral Partner of ASEAN in 1992, a full Dialogue Partner in 1996 and a Summit level partner in 2002. In the last decade, as our respective capacities have grown, our partnership has become all the more relevant. We have now succeeded in putting in place the structural framework for a comprehensive intensification of our co-operation; and we have developed several far-reaching and well conceived projects and programmes in our collective interest.

Your Excellencies, India has been consistent in its support to the evolution of ASEAN's central and leading role in this region. We endorse your objectives for an ASEAN Community by 2015, for a Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, the Initiative for ASEAN Integration and, most recently, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

I am happy to note the significant increase in the people-to-people programmes between ASEAN and India over the last year. The ASEAN and Indian participants in the Car Rally are witness to the strong ties of affection that bind us. This was evident in the spontaneous warmth and hospitality that they received in the 8 ASEAN countries and India that they traversed during their 22 day journey. Our 11 countries participated in this commemorative event with enthusiasm and a sense of great anticipation.

Ladies and gentlemen, geographic connectivity between ASEAN and India is a strategic asset. We are neighbours with long-standing maritime links. We have a bridge between us – of ideas, intellect, trade, and learning over the centuries. We are now adding a “digital” dimension to this connectivity. The ASEAN India Car Rally and the sail training ship INS Sudarshini's expedition to ASEAN countries have not only brought goodwill and awareness along the route that they took but they also brought together multitudes of people in virtual connectivity. These were people who were following the events real time and, speaking to each other through their growing network of electronic mail, through blogs and twitter.

I note that our increasing co-operation in the key sectors of tourism, agriculture, environment, renewable energy, information technology and space allows us to develop innovative approaches to anticipate and address future challenges. Our focus on building capacities and synergies, of improving our mutual connectivity and encouraging economic trade and investment among ourselves is equally important for the development of our human resources, and for bringing stability and prosperity to our people. Our trade has surpassed our expectations. We are now looking at ways and means to enhance co-operation between our Small and Medium Enterprises and entrepreneurial sectors. We should take full advantage of our complementarities through more ambitious agreements; we should catalyse the flows of investments and goods and services, and link the synergies of our youth; we should facilitate the joint initiatives of the industrial sectors in our respective countries and we should improve the infrastructural capacity in our region to meet the aspirations and ambitions of our peoples.

Excellencies, your deliberations earlier today at the Plenary of the Commemorative Summit have set the agenda and showed the way for our collective efforts in the days to come. The Vision Statement emanating from this Summit takes into account some excellent recommendations by the ASEAN-India Eminent Person Group aimed at realizing the full potential of our partnership. I congratulate the Group for its valuable contribution. It is now for our

Governments to formulate specific proposals to pursue the recommendations that they collectively agree to pursue.

India's engagement with the ASEAN has grown in a manner that is commensurate with the increase in our collective capacities, our growing economic integration and the evolving politico-security context in the Asia-Pacific. We have established a robust framework for co-operation under the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity (2010-15).

Excellencies, the ASEAN countries are central to India's Look East Policy. ASEAN continues to be our natural partner in the Asia Pacific region. I would also like to emphasize that our future priorities must attach special importance to our ongoing co-operation in the knowledge and skills sector and make it easier for our professionals, entrepreneurs, students and tourists to travel between our countries. Our growing engagement in areas such as maritime security and counter-terrorism is important to meet these common challenges. Given our cultural affinity, an example of which we witnessed here today, physical proximity, and shared priorities, the ASEAN-India relationship is showing increasing evidence of becoming more comprehensive and strategic in nature.

As we have articulated in the vision statement, a closer integration between ASEAN and India will be to the mutual benefit of the nations that we represent this historic evening.

With these words, Excellencies, I invite you to join me in raising a toast to the strong future of the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership, to the progress and prosperity of all our peoples and to our lasting friendship.
