

Remarks

by

Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia

Director General, ICWA

at
Session-IV of

'Delhi Dialogue VII'

at
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My presence on this platform is recognition of ICWA's role as the principal host institution of the first five editions of Delhi Dialogue; as an engaged collaborator for DD VI and DD VII; and as an institution which has organized successfully a series of important research projects and outreach activities in the area relevant to DD agenda.

Concerning India-ASEAN relations, our assessment shows that they have progressed well in the past over two decades. In the past three years, there is perhaps an air of stagnation as reflected in the trade and investment flow figures, even as our collective endeavours to engage the people at large have accelerated considerably. On the political and strategic aspects, there has, however, been considerable progress in recent months under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. We believe that India-ASEAN relations will henceforth be deeply influenced by the interplay of India's relations with other key players in East Asia. This perspective has been analysed and presented extremely well in our latest publication entitled 'India's Asia-Pacific Engagement'. I am honoured to present a copy to the members of this distinguished panel. I hope all of you will have an opportunity to look at it.



Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia, DG, ICWA delivering Remarks at Session-4 of 'Delhi Dialogue VII'.

In the future development of India-ASEAN relations, the contribution of sub-regional cooperation should not be minimized. Hence, a two-pronged approach is essential i.e. to re-invigorate BIMSTEC and to build up the cooperation in BBIN framework and promote its linkages with ASEAN.

After the end of 2015, ASEAN will enter a new age. However, many of the present issues and priorities, challenges and opportunities shall continue. India's policy makers and opinion makers will need to monitor closely the speed, trajectory and directions of ASEAN in the remaining years of this decade and tailor make our approach accordingly.

External dimensions of our Act East Policy have been favourably commented upon. We believe that our credibility will go up incrementally as we show adherence to credible deadlines in respect of our two flagship projects, namely the Trilateral Highway and Kaladan projects.

Internal dimensions of AEP are even more complex, requiring a judicious blend of sensitivity and firmness. India's policy may not have been as successful as claimed, but it has certainly not been as inadequate as its critics assert. Nevertheless, the prevailing perception in NER – that Act East Policy has failed it - needs to be understood, analyzed and addressed suitably. Words cannot supplant action; charts and maps cannot be the substitute for roads and bridges; calls for 'development corridors', without an effective business strategy, will only be a wish, not a plan. We need to work for and show evidence of actual, enhanced economic development in the Northeast in order to convince its people that India-ASEAN relations have begun to yield dividends for them.

Regarding Delhi Dialogue, our view is that it should continue and it should be consolidated further. We have several suggestions to offer as below:

- We could bring in more civil society voices and perhaps a little bit more of representation from universities. Our collaboration with 'Asian Confluence' produced a valuable conference and an outcome document entitled 'The Shillong Consensus' which deserves wider notice.

- Preparatory activities should be held throughout the year rather than in the last few weeks prior to DD.
- There is a pressing need for an annual event to be hosted by ASEAN which is comparable to Delhi Dialogue.
- Finally, we should set up a 'Young Scholars Forum' which facilitates interaction among younger scholars and generates ideas of the new generation for consideration by veterans.

