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Keynote Address of Secretary (East) at the Joint Inaugural Session (Business & Academic) of Delhi Dialogue IX

July 05, 2017

Ms Naina Lal Kidwai, Past President, FICCI
Ms. Shobana Kamineni, President, CII,
Mr Sandeep Jajodia, President, ASSOCHAM,
Mr Aditya V Agarwal, President, ICC,
Mr Vijay Kalantri, President AIAI
Dr Samir Saran, Vice President ORF
Excellencies,
Heads of Missions of ASEAN Countries,
Distinguished Speakers and Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. I am delighted to address such a distinguished gathering from the corporate and academic worlds of India and ASEAN member states at this Joint Inaugural Session (Business and Academic) of the ninth edition of the Delhi Dialogue.
2. This joint session is a tribute to our enduring ties which have been nurtured and developed under the three pillars of ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership encompassing politico-security, economic and socio-cultural cooperation.
3. Evidence of linkages between Ancient India and South East Asia are abound in texts and folklore, architecture, literature, dance-forms, music, religion and culture. The Malay annals, Burmese chronicles and ancient inscriptions in Viet Nam, all celebrate links with India. Our ancient interactions demonstrate South East Asia's widespread religious and political affinities with the Indian sub-continent. Scholars have observed that the Gupta dynasty provided an attractive coherent model of political, social and religious integration for rulers of South East Asia. Its success was emulated in South East Asia, where Indian influences such as iconography, the Sanskrit language, Buddhism and Hinduism as a way of life were celebrated. Islam and even Christianity in South East Asian countries also have Indian footprints.
4. Importantly, these linkages spread, not through conquest but essentially through non-political agents such as merchants and religious men.

5. In 2017, as ASEAN celebrates the Golden Jubilee of its foundation and we celebrate the silver jubilee of our dialogue partnership with ASEAN, trade and commerce, Cultural and people-to-people exchanges become ever more important in India-ASEAN relations. We hope to deepen these through academic and commercial engagements in particular.
6. Connectivity, both, physical, cultural and people-to-people, plays the foremost role in promoting our understanding and recognising our global and regional commonalities. Our Upanishads urge us to view the world as one family, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. This message of universal harmony, drives our commitment to a secure and stable South East Asia in the overall Asia Pacific context.
7. As recent developments in Asia indicate, connectivity projects have both economic as well as political dimensions. As new connectivity projects bring together communities, countries and economies together in the region, I look forward to the panel on New Connectivity Paradigms in the Asia-Pacific reviewing trans-regional connectivity projects and their impact on existing political configurations in Asia.
8. This has become all the more important as in the absence of an agreed security architecture and the continuation of significant territorial disputes, the Asian landscape has become uncertain. How major powers relate to each other in this complex interplay will impact us all. The session on Regional Geopolitics: Great Power Politics in the Asia-Pacific would assess the larger geopolitical impulses at play in Asia, taking note of specific developments that heighten concerns around the security and stability of its common spaces.
9. ASEAN holds an economic, political and strategic importance for us in the Asia Pacific region. Staying connected with the ASEAN countries is important for us. Our Act East Policy, combines our foreign policy initiatives with our national developmental priorities, especially of our North-Eastern region which is a bridge between the rest of India and ASEAN. Promotion of cross border trade and investment is therefore an important priority.
10. The Honourable Chief Minister of Assam, in his address at the Ministerial session has been kind to outline the development initiatives Assam is taking as a North Eastern state to connect with and complement India's Act East Policy. Assam has taken the lead by organising the Namami Brahmaputra event for generating awareness about the state's untapped business potential, its culture and its people and to fast-track the development process. It will also set up an Act East Department. India, on its own part, has formed Inland Waterways Authority of India which has been given the responsibility for converting 106 rivers across the country into navigable rivers. Our Ministerial session deliberated on ways to harness the waterways of rivers such as Brahmaputra, Barak and Irrawady for promoting trade and people to people connectivity. Today's session on Trade & Tourism through Connectivity – Focus North East & East will continue these discussions.
11. As you are all aware, the Bhupen Hazarika Setu, connecting Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, was inaugurated by Prime Minister in May 2017, enhancing connectivity and giving a fillip to Trade and Commerce prospects within the North East and beyond. We are expeditiously implementing ongoing connectivity projects especially the India Myanmar Thailand Trilateral Highway project. Once completed it will provide seamless connectivity from Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand via Myanmar. Work is in progress on the Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project which will provide a road and riverine link between Myanmar and Mizoram as well as connect Indian ports to Sittwe port in Myanmar. An extension of India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam is also under consideration. Discussions on an India-Myanmar-Thailand Motor Vehicles Agreement are also underway. A Task Force for

Maritime Connectivity and ASEAN-India Working Groups on Regional Air Services and Shipping Arrangements have been set up to address issues to enhance physical connectivity.

12. Moving beyond the physical, we have put forward specific proposals involving the installation of a regional high-capacity fibre-optic network, supplemented by national rural broadband networks and digital villages in remote areas. We have also extended a US\$1 billion Line of Credit, to help finance these and other connectivity projects with ASEAN. The GPON project offered to strengthen digital connectivity in CLMV countries builds upon the experiences we have gained in India in adding 800 million subscribers to the internet, primarily from rural areas. These proposals also benefit the North Eastern states. I would also like you all to consider setting up of ASEAN India Grid Connectivity projects through Myanmar on the lines of India-Bangladesh Grid connectivity.
13. Connectivity paves the way for enhanced trade. Economic partnership between India and ASEAN is deepening day by day. In 1992, India's total trade with ASEAN was less than US\$ 5 billion. Twenty five years later, ASEAN has become India's 4th largest trading partner, accounting for 10 percent of India's total trade, and India has become ASEAN's 7th largest trading partner. After almost two years of slow growth, ASEAN-India trade is now back on track. India's trade with ASEAN has increased to US\$ 70 billion in 2016-17 from US\$ 65 in 2015-16. India's export to ASEAN has increased to US\$ 30 billion in 2016-17 from US\$ 25 billion in 2015-16. Investment flows between them have been growing constantly. The coming into force of the ASEAN India Free Trade Area in July 2015 has enhanced our economic integration. India has also entered into bilateral CEPAs / CECAs with Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia. These reflect India's deep commitment to build a strong institutional architecture for economic ties with ASEAN. We are actively participating in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations. These agreements allow India to offer its services in Finance, Education, Health, IT, Telecommunications and Transport to ASEAN countries with greater ease than what was available earlier.
14. We have created a Project Development Fund for catalyzing our economic presence in CLMV (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam) countries. The Project Development Fund (PDF) with a corpus of Rs.500 crores will facilitate the integration of Indian industries in Regional Value Chains and Production Networks. We have initiated pre-feasibility studies and identified potential areas for investment in the CLMV region. We have also provided a Duty Free Preference Scheme for import of goods from Least Developed Countries (Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar) and accorded preferential treatment to select LDC countries for Services. Since 1st December 2015, India has offered preferential treatment liberalizing Market Access, including movement of natural persons, technical assistance and capacity building. We currently provide a visa fee waiver for Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar applicants applying for Indian Business and Employment visas. As part of Commemorative activities we would be organising a CEOs Forum, an ASEAN India Business Summit, in addition to other trade promotion events in India as well as in ASEAN countries.
15. We have done well, but we can do better. I am confident that today's discussions on ASEAN India trade will come up with new ways and means to enhance our trade.
16. We have increased the funding under the ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund to US\$ 5 million to give impetus to R&D in Technology and Innovation. The technological leaps, particularly in ICT, have generated immense amount of data world-wide in the last decade. Innovative solutions for increasing our ability to manage this big data have become the key to bringing immense benefits to mankind. In India, management and storage of AADHAR details and details of record number of bank accounts opened for use by common man under the Jan Dhan Yojana have ushered us into the realm of Big Data. The businesses dealing with big data is likely to grow by 10% per annum or more globally. 20 – 30 billion devices would be wirelessly connected to the Internet of Things by 2020. The fourth revolution in Industry would be upon us

in the next few decades, making way for Robotics and automation in almost every field. This is an opportune time for us to take a closer look at this new revolution in the making.

17. Our historical people-to-people ties have been fostered and strengthened by the presence of Indian Diaspora in ASEAN countries. Many Indians emigrated to South East Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries, with the British colonial rulers sending hundreds of thousands of Indians to work in plantations and mines in the region. Their descendants today constitute a vibrant community of Indian origin people, contributing actively to their respective countries of adoption. Malaysia alone has nearly 2 million persons of Indian origin, constituting the second largest Indian diaspora abroad, after the United States. In celebration of the same, we shall be organising a regional Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas with our Indian Diaspora from ASEAN countries in August 2017.
18. The second Conference on Cultural and Civilizational Links, which was held in Jakarta in January 2017, came out with a number of recommendations, which are now being sought to be implemented in a phased manner. The conference engaged panelists on four topical issues viz. (i) Trade, Maritime and Cultural Heritage between India and South east Asia (ii) Shared Cultural Relations between ASEAN and India (iii) Strengthening Cultural Links between ASEAN and India, and (iv) Looking forward: ASEAN-India partnership in Culture. I am sure today's session would throw up more suggestions on the specific ways in which the Indian diaspora can contribute to future progress in India-ASEAN relations.
19. Let me end by thanking you all for joining us in our efforts to make India ASEAN partnership, "scale new heights and constitute a defining partnership of our times." I would say that the theme of Delhi Dialogue IX viz. 'India and the ASEAN – Charting the Course for the Next Twenty Five years' aptly summarizes our endeavours in this regard.

Thank You.



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