

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
BY H.E. MR. PHAM BINH MINH
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER,
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AT THE 3RD ROUND-TABLE ON ASEAN - INDIA
NETWORK OF THINKTANKS
(Hanoi, 25th August 2014)

**“BUILDING A STRONGER ASEAN - INDIA
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP
IN THE 21ST CENTURY”**

Excellency Minister Swaraj,

Distinguished Ambassadors and delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is indeed my pleasure to be here today at the 3rd Round-table on ASEAN - India Network of ThinkTanks. I wish to offer a special greeting to our guest of honor, Minister Swaraj. Thank you so much for joining us this morning.

I also wish to thank ASEAN - India Center at RIS and Viet Nam Institute of Indian and Soutwest Asian Studies (VIISAS) for hosting this event. I am very delighted to see many distinguished participants here with us to discuss issues that are so critical to our future ASEAN - India partnership.

Two weeks ago, Minister Swaraj and I took part in the ASEAN - India Ministerial Meeting in Nay Pyi Taw. I recall and fully concur with Madam Minister's views at the meeting that the ASEAN - India Strategic Partnership owes its strength to the fact that your 'Look East' policy meets our ASEAN's 'outward-looking' policy. And, there is synergy and a sense of fraternity in our partnership.

ASEAN welcomes Prime Minister Modi's reaffirmation of India's Look East Policy and cooperation with ASEAN.

This morning, Minister Swaraj and I also had fruitful and in-depth discussions on these issues as well as our bilateral relationship. And we agreed that Viet Nam -India strategic partnership comes naturally as the fundamentals of our bonds are strong.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. Entering the 21st century, particularly since the global economic and financial crisis, the world is moving toward a multi-polar and multi-layered setting with the increasing trend of democratization.

And people are talking about “the Indo-Pacific” in recognition of the indispensable and inseparable role of India as well as the centrality of ASEAN Community in the future of our region.

With what is going on in the world today, our interests across the region are aligning more closely than ever. And the next 5-to-10 year period is crucial to our relations and even more so with ASEAN becoming a full-fledged community and India a well-established power in the world.

Therefore, it is time for us to build *a stronger ASEAN - India strategic partnership in the 21st century*. Let me share with you some of my thoughts on the historic potential of our partnership.

2.1. *First*, just within two decades, ASEAN-India relations have grown rapidly from a sectoral dialogue partnership to a full dialogue partnership and a strategic partnership in 2012. ASEAN always views India as a key element in the evolving regional architecture.

ASEAN sees India as an important polar of the multi-polar regional order. From early on, India has been a great contributor to the ASEAN Regional

Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Defense Minister Plus (ADMM+) processes. India's power came not from its might but more so from the soft power derived from its great civilization and its influence today in the international stage. Traces of India's civilization and influence straddle across South East Asia as concrete evidence of India's ancient influence and connectivity through this region.

Today, the Asia - Pacific has become a centre of global political economic gravity and a key theatre for the intense interplay among major powers. We recognize that both ASEAN and India stand at an important turning point.

So, we have more shared interests and prominent denominators. We both aspire for a peaceful, stable region where sovereignty and territorial integrity are fully respected, where the rule of law, especially the fundamental principles of international law such as the UN Charter, the UNCLOS continue to govern inter-state relations and how inter-state conflicts are resolved, without the threat or use of force.

Such a region of peace and stability is so much needed as ASEAN and India are both entering a new strategic phase of development, and accelerating our national goals of reform, economic restructuring for sustainable development.

And as both sides are also engaging in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations, our destiny and development are all the more intertwined.

For our part, ASEAN is soon becoming a resilient, integrated, inclusive and harmonious Community by the end of 2015. And ASEAN strives to maintain its centrality in the evolving regional architecture.

We are determined to not simply be a “taker” of the regional architecture but also a proactive “shaper” of the evolving architecture with our post-2015 ASEAN Vision.

Today, India is even more powerful globally due to its leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement, G20, BRICS and other multilateral arrangements. India is expected to surpass Japan, Russia and key

EU members to become the world's third largest economy by 2020.

Secondly, ASEAN and India also have a shared stake in addressing regional and global challenges. Our cooperation needs to be more effective and efficient as the security and development landscape is experiencing swift and complex conversions.

Traditional and non-traditional security issues have become more acute and complicated than ever. While ethnic and religious tensions and territorial disputes, particularly the East Sea (the South China Sea) and the East China Sea have become more complicated with far-reaching implications.

Thirdly, the elevation of the ASEAN - India partnership is timely and fully relevant to the ongoing trend of globalization and integration for sustainable development.

With changes in the global economy, international integration is becoming broader in scope and in-depth, focusing more on development and response to global challenges. This trend can be seen by the proliferation of numerous next-generation FTAs and mega linkages.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Against such backdrop, the next decade is crucial to shaping the global and regional landscape, especially the ASEAN - India relations. The profiles of ASEAN and India also will be better defined.

3. So, the question before us is as to what we should do to make our partnership genuinely strategic. Let me highlight some areas for our future cooperation.

First, in our today's globalized and interconnected world, our top priority is to work more closely together to ensure an open, inclusive, sustainable and transparent regional architecture for peace and stability in Asia. We also seek to build up strategic trust, uphold the international law, and consolidate the complementarity of the existing and emerging regional arrangements. To this end, India is and will remain our indispensable partner.

The future development and integration of ASEAN and India largely lie in the East Sea (the South China Sea) and the Indian Ocean. So, our cooperation should focus more on maintaining maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation,

and settling territorial disputes through peaceful means on the basis of international law, including UNCLOS 1982.

ASEAN counts on India's continued support to the full implementation of the Declaration of the Conduct (DOC) and early finalization of the Code of Conduct (COC).

Secondly, we need to do more to forge our economic and trade linkages in order to lay a sound basis for our partnership. This is crucial to sustain the Asia - Pacific region as an engine of global growth. In this connection, we need to expeditiously fulfill the ASEAN – India FTA commitments, and to accelerate the negotiations to establish the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

ASEAN, including Viet Nam, is becoming a hub for strategic partnership, comprehensive partnership and FTA frenzy with all the leading global partners. So, there are more tangible opportunities for Indian businesses.

We always welcome India's investment and cooperation, especially in human resources

development, healthcare, information technology, and manufacturing in infrastructure.

We can also promote inter-sub regional cooperation, particularly the Mekong - Ganga Cooperation and Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and ASEAN - India Highway Network ... These projects are important to accelerate regional integration, alleviate poverty and narrow the development gap.

Thirdly, I share Madam Minister's perspective that *connectivity should be developed in all dimensions of our strategic partnership*. Physical, institutional and people-to-people connectivity should be our priority. Youth exchange and interactions are most important.

Fourthly, in our interconnected world, it is imperative to enhance global dimension of our cooperation in response to common challenges. In my view, our region's immediate needs are to address climate change, natural disasters, epidemics, food-water-energy security, maritime safety and security, terrorism and cyber security.

Fifthly, *we should continue to support and work with each other at international fora*, notably the UN, WTO, G20 and the Non-Aligned Movement. We stand ready to work with India to make the voice of developing countries heard, and to ensure an equitable, democratic and transparent global governance. Viet Nam continues to strongly support UN reform and India's permanent membership of the UN Security Council when it is reformed.

4. With our vast shared interests and values as such, we have reasons to firmly believe that ASEAN-India traditional bonds will be strengthened, our mutual trust will be enhanced and our partnership will be deepened. Vietnam is ready to be one of the gateways for India's stronger engagement in South East Asia.

Let me take this opportunity to thank you all for your championship and invaluable contributions to deepening Viet Nam - India fraternal ties and ASEAN - India partnership.

I hope you will have fruitful deliberations at this round-table. Thank you very much.