India-East Asia relations since the beginning of 2013 are a model of “low drama.” India continues to steadily manage and move forward its relations with both large and small countries – from China to Laos – using a mix of tools including government policy, the private sector, and broader societal links. India has been diplomatically, economically, and to some extent militarily rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific for about 20 years; a result of a combination of factors including the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the “Eastern bloc,” the economic dynamism of East Asia, and India’s own “Look East” policies combined with some Asian countries reciprocal efforts (e.g., Japan and ASEAN countries) to expand the role of “external” powers in the region. A careful analysis of India-East Asia ties suggests how much progress has been made in expanding ties and how much potential remains. Closing this gap will be the story of India-East Asia relations for decades. But as tensions rise in Asia and regional countries jostle for economic growth, diplomatic space, and security reassurances it seems a safe bet that India will continue to be an element, and possibly an increasingly important element, of the strategic picture.

India and China

India-China relations revolved around two major visits in 2013 and early 2014. The first, May 19-22, 2013, was by Premier Li Keqiang to India. Although this was the first visit by Li to India as an official of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) government and his first visit outside China since being named premier, he had visited India in 1986 as the leader of a youth delegation. During the May 2013 visit, the two governments issued a 35-point Joint Statement and signed eight agreements to develop sister city and state/province relationships, translate 25 classic and contemporary works from each country, and coordinate specific work programs of the Joint Economic Group. An agreement also covered Chinese reporting on water level, discharge, and rainfall at three hydrological stations on the mainstream Brahmaputra.

On economic issues, Prime Minister Singh expressed ongoing Indian “concerns about the trade deficit and sought increased market access to China for [Indian] exports and investments. [He] also invited increased Chinese involvement in the vast opportunities in our infrastructure and manufacturing sectors.” Premier Li responded only by saying that “the two sides will discuss and explore ways to achieve trade and investment liberalization and facilitation and to work out a practical roadmap for arriving at a dynamic balance in our trading relationship. The two sides will also promote cooperation in infrastructure and industrial zones…” There is some sense that India’s primarily security-based impediments to Chinese telecom investments in India (e.g., Huawei), have in turn led China to impose restrictions on Indian pharmaceutical and information technology exports.
Apart from a fairly robust two-way trade relationship of about $100 billion (with an Indian deficit of about $30 billion in 2013), the value of Chinese investment projects in India is substantial. Indeed, an Indian official, when asked by an Indian journalist about a $35 billion figure for Chinese investment in infrastructure responded by saying that “Actually the figure is $55 billion” and by clarifying that this is the “amount of [Chinese] projects that are either completed or in the pipeline in India” and “not investment in terms of foreign direct investment” or “setting up factories or units” but rather “projects which Chinese companies are doing in India including in many sectors as well as the infrastructure sector.” The focus on mutual investment prospects was also highlighted by India’s ambassador to Beijing, who said that “Really both sides saw investment as providing part of the solution to trade problems, that if there was more investment it would in a sense facilitate trade between the two countries, it would create more employment, it would open up new areas. I think projects particularly in the infrastructure sector were very positively looked at.”

One new bilateral economic mechanism established during the visit was the first meeting of the India-China CEO Forum (several CEO Forums between India and East Asia countries were established in 2013 and 2014). On wider global and regional economic issues, an Indian briefersaid “regional trade and connectivity came up for discussion. This included issues like the RCEP and the RTA, the bilateral FTA, which as many of you would be aware is a goal that we are looking at when conditions are right.”

PM Singh made two key points during his press appearance with PM Li. First, he linked continued productive India-China relations with management of border and territorial differences. Such a blunt linkage appears to be something new, perhaps reflecting acute tensions especially in the Western sector of the border dispute. Singh said, “The basis for continued growth and expansion of our ties is peace and tranquility on our borders. While seeking an early resolution of the boundary question, Premier Li and I have agreed that this must continue to be preserved.” India’s Ambassador to China S. Jaishankar said “I think the main point made from our side was that peace and tranquility on the border is the foundation of our relationship.”

PM Singh also referred to current efforts to manage border issues saying “We also took stock of lessons learnt from the recent incident in the Western Sector, when existing mechanisms proved their worth. We tasked our Special Representatives to consider further measures that may be needed to maintain peace and tranquility along the border. We agreed that our Special Representatives will meet soon to continue discussions, seeking early agreement on a framework for a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable boundary settlement.” Premier Li retorted that “with regard to the boundary question, one that is left over by history, the two sides have over time established the principles for settling this question. And in the meantime we have worked together to maintain tranquility and peace in the border areas. Both sides believe that we need to improve various border-related mechanisms that we have to put into place and make them more efficient, and we need to appropriately manage and resolve our differences.”

China and India are negotiating “a border defense cooperation agreement” (BDCA). The Indian press cast the agreement as one under which troop levels will be frozen and thus blunt Indian plans to expand forces and capabilities along the border. When asked about the issue at a press...
briefing prior to Premier Li’s visit to Delhi in May, Joint Secretary for East Asia Guatam Bhambawale said only that the topic was being discussed between the two countries and we would have to “wait and see.” But Indian officials denied that BDCA had actually been discussed between PM Singh and Premier Li. S. Jaishankar, when asked “was the border defence cooperation agreement discussed or how to go forward on it?” simply said “no.” He noted that the PRC draft proposal had been given to India on March 4 and India had replied on May 10. Therefore it “is not at all surprising the matter did not come up because it is still something on which we need to engage them in detailed discussions.”

A second issue prioritized by PM Singh during PM Li’s May 2013 visit was river waters and specifically “…India’s concerns about the effects on lower riparians of activities in the upper reaches of our shared rivers. It would be useful for the mandate of our Expert Level Mechanism to be expanded to include information sharing on upstream development projects on these rivers. I am glad that we have agreed to expand cooperation on trans-border rivers. It would also be useful for India and China to collaborate on a better understanding of the stresses on our shared Himalayan ecosystem.” Premier Li responded “With regard to Indian concerns about trans-border rivers, in recent years we have shared hydrological information with the Indian side bearing in mind the overall interests of our relations and acting in a humanitarian spirit. And we stand ready to step up communication with the Indian side with regard to the development of water resources and environmental protection.”

A second important visit occurred when Prime Minister Singh visited Beijing Oct. 21-23. An 11-point Joint Statement was issued but contained few surprises. Both sides reaffirmed a commitment to their so-called “Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity” on the basis of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence [Panchsheel].” The statement noted that the exchange of visits between the prime minister of India and the premier of China within the same calendar year was the first since 1954 and claimed that this “has great significance.”

One intriguing announcement was that “India and China will discuss with Myanmar appropriate ways of commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence [Panchsheel],” especially since the original five principles were signed bilaterally in 1954, between India-China and China-Myanmar. A trilateral commemoration is noteworthy given the competition among between China and India in Myanmar. Which country initiated the idea of a trilateral commemoration is unclear, but that both Beijing and New Delhi have now publicly agreed to it (presumably after having consulted with Nay Pyi Taw) is notable.

Two of the nine substantive points of the Joint Statement dealt with economic issues – and these were also the most extensive elements. The two sides expressed commitment to mechanisms such as the Strategic Economic Dialogue and the Joint Economic Group. A new initiative appears to be “to look into the prospects of a bilateral Regional Trade Arrangement (RTA).”

Of the nine agreements and MoUs signed during the visit (three of which dealt with city- and provincial-level interactions), the two most important were a new Border Defense Agreement and one on cooperation on trans-boundary rivers.
India and China already have several agreements and mechanisms to manage border and territorial disputes. The Joint Statement specifically cited the “previous agreements signed in 1993, 1996 and 2005 that recognize the principle of mutual and equal security…” There is also of course the long running but utterly inconclusive Special Representative Talks. The need for yet another Border Defense Agreement (BDA) can thus be seen both as another step forward in refining border management or yet another layer of delay and a sign of the ineffectiveness of existing arrangements. In either case, the BDA is based on four concepts that India’s ambassador to Beijing laid out in quite useful detail in a press briefing during PM Singh’s visit. The key “take-away” may be that the BDA is designed to manage very specific behaviors and tactical problems that could arise along the un-demarcated borders.

As for the trans-boundary rivers agreement, PM Singh characterized it only as “incremental progress.” He went on to say “They have agreed to supply data for more number of days. Also they have recognized that the behavior of the trans-border river system is of interest to all riparian states. So, our concerns have been put on the table. I hope there will be progress in years to come.”

It is not clear what 2014 will bring in the bilateral relationship, especially once a new government takes power following India’s elections in April-May. But the two sides have announced that they will mark the 60th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Panchsheel) in 2014 by designating it as the “Year of Friendly Exchanges.”

**India-Japan relations**

The symbolic height of India-Japan relations during the period under review occurred in late 2013 when Japan’s emperor and empress visited India from Nov. 30-Dec. 5. This was the first-ever visit by a Japanese emperor and empress to India, and the first time the same couple came to visit India 50 years previously. The visit advanced India-Japan relations in a general rather than specific way both in its symbolism and marking the end of the first 60 years of diplomatic relations.

A key highlight of India-Japan relations during 2014 thus far has been the visit of PM Abe in January as chief guest for India’s Republic Day – the first Japanese prime minister to be accorded this honor. The emphasis on security issues is notable – the subject of seven of the first 10 points of a 51-point Joint Statement. Both sides reiterated “their resolve to further deepen the Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan.” Specifically, following Abe’s elaboration of Japan’s policy of “Proactive Contribution to Peace,” Singh reportedly “appreciated Japan’s efforts to contribute to peace and stability of the region and the world.” On the one hand, this comment is not a resounding show of support for Abe’s plan for a more active foreign and security policy much less a call for Japan to undertake collective self-defense, but the anodyne statement combined with other elements of bilateral security cooperation does welcome Japan’s more muscular role. For example, the two prime ministers said they were satisfied with the first meeting in December 2013 of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on US-2 amphibian aircraft and welcomed a second meeting in March 2014. Such cooperation could not take place absent relaxed restrictions on Japan’s arms exports. The two sides also welcomed the second bilateral navy-to-navy exercise in December 2013 off the coast of Chennai and announced plans...
to conduct a joint exercise in the Pacific Ocean in 2014. The specific reference about conducting exercises in both the Indian and Pacific oceans is likely a signal of mutual Indo-Pacific interest; highlighting Japan’s range of action extending to the Indian Ocean and India’s to the Pacific. However, there does seem to be some sense that these initial steps require further consolidation and effort as reflected in the statement that the two sides felt it necessary to “reaffirm the importance of such exercises, and renew their resolution to continue to conduct them on a regular basis with increased frequency.” PM Abe, in his media statement, referred to the need to “step up cooperation in the area of maritime security,” but he mentioned this would be done “through active dialogue and visits” rather than exercises. Still, maritime safety and security is being enhanced through “counter-piracy activities, participation in bilateral and multilateral exercises as well as sharing of information” and a dialogue between the two countries’ coast guards.

The two leaders also noted Japanese Defense Minister Onodera Itsunori’s 2013 visit to India and “welcomed the decision of the two defense ministers to realize the visit of Indian Defense Minister to Japan within 2014.” It is worth noting that the joint statement highlighted the US-Japan-India Trilateral Dialogue directly in the context of a bilateral Japan-India defense relationship that includes a “2 + 2” dialogue and a Defense Policy Dialogue. A new mechanism launched during the visit was bilateral consultations between the two National Security Councils.

The prospect of India-Japan civil nuclear cooperation remains distant. Singh would only say “Our negotiations towards an Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy have gained momentum in the last few months.” Abe was even more circumspect offering only that he and Singh “agreed to continue talks with a view to the early conclusion of the agreement.”

Prime Ministers Abe and Singh also discussed a range of economic issues including Japan’s considerable economic assistance to India as well as efforts to promote trade and investment. Eight bilateral agreements were signed on cooperation ranging from specific assistance projects to improved health care and tourism.

Abe’s important visit to India demonstrates that India-Japan relations have moved beyond “small ball,” but it has not reached major league status either. As Abe concluded in his media statement, “The relations between Japan and India have the greatest potential of any bilateral relationship anywhere in the world.”

India-South Korea

India-South Korea relations in 2014 got off to a high-level start with the Jan. 15-17 visit of President Park Geun-hye to New Delhi. The last few years have seen regular high-level exchanges with President Lee Myung-bak going to Delhi as the chief guest at Republic Day in 2010, India’s president traveling to Seoul in 2011, and PM Singh going to the ROK in 2012.

A joint statement issued at the conclusion of President’s Park trip expressed satisfaction with the state of the “Strategic Partnership” established in January 2010. But the statement also made clear that the two countries are seeking to take the relationship further because the full potential of bilateral relations has not been reached. They therefore “agreed to develop the Strategic
Partnership between the two countries in a more substantial and concrete manner.” The main mechanisms for political security dialogue are the India-ROK Joint Commission, Foreign Policy & Security Dialogue, the India-ROK Defense Ministers’ Dialogue and the Joint Committee on Defense Logistics and Industry. The two countries agreed during the visit to launch a dialogue between their National Security Council structures and a dialogue on cybersecurity. So, while there is an infrastructure in place for advancing relations and it was agreed to continue to use these mechanisms on a regular basis, concrete developments are limited. For example, both sides welcomed the conclusion of an Agreement on the Protection of Classified Military Information.

On the economic front, there were no major announcements as both sides agreed to upgrade the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) that came into effect in 2010. Other initiatives to build trade and investment ties included the initialing of the revised Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement, establishment of a India-ROK Joint Trade and Investment Promotion Committee at the cabinet-level as an “expanded and restructured replacement of the current India-ROK Joint Investment Promotion Committee, as well as the establishment of a Korea Trade Promotion Corporation (KOTRA) office in Bangalore and Korea International Trade Association (KITA) office in New Delhi. Both leaders also committed themselves to revising the India-ROK Air Services Agreement. The actual trade and investment levels between the two countries remain well below potential. According to a press briefing at the time of the visit, India’s Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) estimates that Korean FDI in India is about $3 billion and India’s FDI in ROK is about $1 billion. Given the size of the two economies, this is miniscule. The news on the trade front is no better. Though trade increased in 2010 and 2011 following CEPA’s entry into force, an Indian official acknowledged that in 2012 bilateral trade has slowed and India continues to run a deficit.

Regarding the long-running discussions about civil nuclear cooperation, the joint statement said only that the “two leaders agreed to hold regular exchanges to expand cooperation in the civil nuclear energy sector.”

India and Southeast Asia/ASEAN Relations

2013 was expected to be a less active year in India-Southeast Asia relations because 2012 was the 20th anniversary of India-Southeast Asia/ASEAN relations as dialogue partners and the 10th anniversary of a summit-level dialogue. In fact, there were important mutual bilateral visits during the year. India participated fully in the Brunei-hosted 8th East Asia Summit and the 11th ASEAN-India Summit in October. PM Singh traveled to Myanmar in March 2014 to participate in the third Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Summit held in Nay Pyi Taw. Overall trade reached just over $75 billion in 2012 – just surpassing the goal of $70 billion. A goal for two-way trade at $100 billion was set during the 11th ASEAN-India Summit. However, as of this writing, an ASEAN-India Trade in Services and Investment Agreement has not been signed, though the Chairman’s Statement at the 11th ASEAN-India Summit expects operationalization by July 2014. In a March 2014, India’s external affairs minister stated that “We have completed our process for signing of the FTA on Services and Investment and we await the completion of the processes amongst the ASEAN countries.” In April 2014, India also announced the creation of a separate mission to
ASEAN with a resident ambassador as an example of commitment to the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership.

India and Vietnam: “6 years into the strategic partnership”

India and Vietnam shared two important visits in 2013. From Jan. 14-17, India’s Vice President Hamid Ansari visited Hanoi for the closing ceremony of the “Year of Friendship between India and Vietnam.” However, the highlight of bilateral relations was the November 2013 visit to India of General Secretary of the Communist Party Nguyen Phu Trong. This was the general secretary’s first state visit to India. A 32-point Joint Statement focusing on strategic engagement, economic partnership, cultural ties, and cooperation, both regionally and globally was issued. Eight bilateral agreements were signed including an agreement to share and protect classified information in order to support implementation of the November 2009 MoU on Defense Cooperation and an MoU between Vietnam Oil and Gas Group and India’s ONGC Videsh Ltd “for association in the field of exploration, development and production of petroleum resources between the two countries for new investments by OVL in oil and gas blocks in Vietnam for oil and gas exploration and production. Petro Vietnam is also invited to participate in open blocks in India and in third countries.” The latter is significant as it makes the point that the two countries will continue to cooperate in this area despite expressed PRC opposition to such cooperation in disputed areas of the South China Sea.

PM Singh and General Secretary Trong noted the widening and deepening of defense and military ties, including training of Vietnam’s naval and air force personnel, and welcomed the agreement to protect classified information. But it seems that the $100 million line of credit for defense cooperation that was earlier extended to Vietnam by India has not been utilized or at least not fully as “both sides continue to work closely on suitable terms and conditions...” Both Delhi and Hanoi consider security ties important and in mid-April 2014 the 3rd India-Vietnam Strategic Dialogue was held in New Delhi.

Hanoi and New Delhi also reiterated their commitment to freedom of navigation in the East Sea/South China Sea and called on parties to “exercise restraint, avoid threat or use of force and resolve disputes through peaceful means in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the UNCLOS. They also welcomed the collective commitment of the concerned parties to abide by and implement the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and to work towards the adoption of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea on the basis of consensus. They called for cooperation in ensuring security of sea-lanes, maritime security, combating piracy and conducting search and rescue operations.”

On economic issues, the two sides noted that the target of $7 billion in bilateral trade by 2015 was within reach. They set a target of increasing bilateral trade to $15 billion by 2020. Nevertheless, a decision was made to form a new Joint Sub-Commission on Trade to expand ties. On the investment front, Singh “requested General Secretary Trong to facilitate them further in Vietnam” while expressing appreciation for Hanoi’s decision to award Tata Power a $1.8 billion thermal power project and another offshore block to ONGC Videsh Ltd for “continued oil and gas exploration.” At the time of the July 2013 India-Vietnam Joint Commission meeting, External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid noted that Indian FDI in Vietnam stood at about

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$936 million in 86 projects across many sectors. Hanoi has acknowledged Indian requests about facilitating investment. Prior to the general secretary’s visit for example, Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh, speaking at a press conference after the July 2013 Joint Commission Meeting said “Vietnam is committed to creating favourable conditions for Indian business investing in Vietnam.”

Two other notable areas of economic cooperation are banking and credit. An MoU between the two countries’ central banks is intended to move representative offices into “full-fledged branches in the near future.” Speaking after the July 2013 Joint Commission Meeting, External Affairs Minister Khurshid announced that India had extended 17 Lines of Credit totaling $164.5 million and was considering extending another $100 million.

On wider international matters, General Secretary Nguyen specified that his country “highly appreciates” India’s support for Hanoi’s candidacy for a non-permanent membership of the UNSC for the 2020-2021 term and “reiterates its support for India to become a permanent member of the enlarged UN Security Council and a non-permanent of the UN Security Council for subsequent terms.”

**India-Thailand**

The main event of India-Thailand relations in 2013 was the visit of PM Singh to Bangkok on May 30-June 3 to meet PM Yingluck Shinawatra. The two countries issued a comprehensive 41-point Joint Statement. Unlike in other India-East Asia bilateral relationships, trade and investment cooperation topped the agenda – the first section of the Joint Statement.

Both sides expressed satisfaction that trade stood at $8.6 billion, an increase of over 15 percent per year for the past five years. However, no specific target was set for additional growth. Each leader emphasized the importance of investment for economic growth and job creation. In 2012, it was reported that Thailand’s Board of Investment approved some 25 Indian investment projects worth about $200 million. This suggests fairly small investments. Meanwhile, Thai FDI into India remains very limited at about $12 million in 2012. Both countries seek investment from the other for major infrastructure projects. Singh and Shinawatra announced the establishment of a Thailand-India Business Forum to facilitate private sector partnerships. Another measure was a fast-track business visa service to qualified entrepreneurs. The big measures for expanding trade, however, remain slow-moving. A Thailand-India FTA has been under negotiation and there was “hope” that it could be concluded after the June-July 2013 negotiations in Bangkok. Precisely what constitutes a “comprehensive and balanced outcome” for the FTA as called for in the joint statement is unclear.

India and Thailand are emphasizing connectivity through the development of road and shipping infrastructure linking the two countries. An example is the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project. The goal is to complete the project by 2016. However, many are skeptical about these connectivity projects including links to the port at Dawei. But air connectivity is strong with some 150 flights between the two countries per week.
No new initiatives were announced in defense and security relations, which revolve around a Defense Dialogue, mutual defense minister visits, and coordinated patrols (CORPATs) between the two navies.

In 2014, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand, an eminent scholar of Sanskrit and Pali, visited historical and religious sites across India and met Indian officials. The visit keeps India-Thailand relations engaged at a high-level following Yingluck Shinawatra’s visit as chief guest for Republic Day and PM Singh’s 2013 visit to Bangkok.

India-Indonesia

PM Singh’s Oct. 10-12, 2013 visit to Indonesia was the key event for this bilateral relationship. Amazingly, this was the first official, bilateral visit of Singh to Jakarta though he had attended the Asian-African Summit to commemorate the Bandung Conference in 2005 and the East Asia Summit in 2011. Despite the establishment of a “Strategic Partnership” in 2005 during President Yudhoyono’s visit to India and the issuance of a joint statement for a “Vision for the India-Indonesia New Strategic Partnership Over the Coming Decade” in 2011 – again during Yudhoyono’s visit – very little progress has been made. In 2013, the two countries therefore articulated a “five-pronged” (echoing Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence or Panchsheel) approach to improving ties.

Strategic engagement and defense and security cooperation topped the joint statement. The main instruments for defense cooperation are the Joint Defense Cooperation Committee and the service-level staff talks. During the visit it was decided that staff talks, which already exist between the two armies and navies, should be expanded to include the two air forces.

The bilateral economic partnership remains modest but full of potential. Two-way trade stands at about $20 billion, but growth has been quite slow, increasing five-fold in about a decade. India’s FDI in Indonesia is about $10 billion. According to an Indian briefer during PM Singh’s visit, “[t]here are some issues regarding some of these investment projects.” Based on India’s request, the “President of Indonesia has agreed that there will be a joint high-level task force which will go into issues pertaining to investment and encourage two-way flow of investment because this is again another very important area of cooperation.” The two countries also launched a CEO Forum, the first meeting of which was chaired by India’s minister for commerce and industry.

India-Philippines

Regular high-level India-Philippine discussions are a new feature of India’s “Look East” policy as well as Manila’s wider diplomatic activities in the context of the Philippines’ disputes with China in the South China Sea. Clearly, both Delhi and Manila see good reasons to strengthen their relationship. An example is the new India-Philippine Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation. The 2nd meeting of this mechanism was held Oct. 21, 2013 when India’s external affairs minister traveled to Manila to discuss a wide range of bilateral, regional and international matters. But it is also clear that while both countries share concerns about China’s assertive behavior and flimsy claims, New Delhi is proceeding especially carefully. For example, the joint statement issued at the conclusion of the Second Joint Commission meeting noted that while
“Secretary Del Rosario briefed Minister Khurshid on developments in the West Philippine Sea [emphasis added] the response was a bland “support for a peaceful resolution of the West Philippine Sea/South China Sea [emphasis added] dispute consistent with freedom of navigation and the rule of law.”

Though both sides used carefully and distinctly differently worded statements on the maritime issue, an interesting but still quite limited new feature of bilateral relations is defense cooperation. A Joint Defense Cooperation Committee (JDCC) has been established, two meetings of which have been held, and commitments made to expand military training and education exchanges. Specifically, “Secretary Del Rosario thanked Minister Khurshid for the naval ship visits which strengthened relations between Philippine and Indian navy and coast guard forces.”

India and Laos

In September 2013, External Affairs Minister Khurshid travelled to Laos for the 7th India-Lao Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) on Bilateral Cooperation. He also took the occasion to inaugurate the Second Roundtable of the ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks.

In the India-Laos talks an agreement was signed to provide a $30.94 million credit line for four irrigation projects in three provinces in the Laos. Another line of credit was signed to substitute the Nam Boun-2 hydro power plant by the extension of transmission lines to Thasala-Laksao. The value of this credit was reported as $35.25 million.

India-Australia

Two “bookend” (in January and November) foreign minister-level visits were the high points of bilateral relations in 2013. The two visits offered an opportunity to build on the October 2012 state visit of then-Prime Minister Julia Gillard. Foreign Minister Bob Carr came to Delhi Jan. 19-22 for the 8th round of the Foreign Ministers Framework Dialogue of the two countries, which included discussion of a range of issues including Afghanistan, maritime security in the Indian Ocean, strengthening regional and global institutions such as the East Asia Summit and G20, and combating terrorism. One specific outcome of the visit was agreement to “an expanded bilateral dialogue on cyber policy,” but no details were provided. Reporting indicates the dialogue will commence after completion of India’s elections and formation of a new government.

The main announcement from the January 2013 visit was an agreement to hold the first round of negotiations on a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement on March 18. The Australian side framed this agreement in the context of India’s energy needs, saying “India’s energy needs are growing quickly and the country has set a target of 25 per cent of base-load power generation to be nuclear by 2050.” At the time of this writing, reportedly four rounds of talks have been held – the latest in Canberra in February 2014. In an interview with India’s The Hindu Australia’s Ambassador to India Peter Suckling said “The negotiations went very well. There is a good spirit in the negotiations. We are looking at having another [round of talks] shortly. We are making a significant progress... I’m very optimistic.” But he noted that “Currently, there are some points
of differences we are working through ... India has its template. We have our template. We are working out how we can reconcile those two ... I don’t think there is any show-stopper.”

In November 2013, India’s External Affairs Minister Khurshid travelled to Perth to participate in the Indian Ocean Region Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) meeting. India concluded its chairmanship of the organization, and Australia assumed the chair.

On the economic front, India-Australia trade and investment continues to grow. Two-way trade stands just under $17 billion: India is Australia’s fourth largest export market and the ninth overall trading partner. Ambassador Suckling opined that doubling the volume of trade by 2015 was possible and cited growing Indian coal imports from Australia as a component of expanded trade. He also noted that India’s investment in Australia had climbed to just under $12 billion. However, despite five rounds of talks, India and Australia have not reached a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement and it is expected that the two governments will take up the issue after a new government takes power in Delhi.

Conclusion: India and East Asia

As this review of India-East Asia relations is being written, India is completing its national elections and will then form a new government. While basic diplomatic ties between India and East Asia will continue during this transition period, it is difficult to imagine that it will be a period of new initiatives and dramatic departures in relations. It is well worth noting that several other Asian countries are also conducting elections. There has been speculation about what a government headed by Narendra Modi, who is expected to become India’s prime minister, will mean for India-East Asia relations. But so far there is little in the election manifestoes, past actions, or election rhetoric that provides “hard evidence” about the future direction of relations. Given the roughly 20-year record of the rebalance in India’s relations with East Asia, it is reasonable to expect that relations will deepen and strengthen at a rate that fits the capacity and interests of both India and the region, no matter what others might wish or deem possible.

Chronology of India-US Relations

January 2013 – April 2014

Jan. 14-17, 2013: Vice President Hamid Ansari Visits Vietnam for closing ceremony of the India-Vietnam Friendship Year.

January 19-22, 2013: Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr visits India.

March 26-27, 2013: India’s External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid visits Japan for the 7th India-Japan Strategic Dialogue.

May 9-10, 2013: India’s External Affairs Minister Khurshid visits China for consultations on the proposed visit of Premier Li Keqiang.
May 19-22, 2013: Premier of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China Li Keqiang makes a state visit to India and got to both Delhi and Mumbai.

May 27-29, 2013: India’s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visits Japan for the annual summit of prime ministers.


July 1-2, 2013: External Affairs Minister Khurshid visits Brunei for ASEAN-related meetings including the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference, East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers Meeting, and the 11th ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers Meeting.

July 3-4, 2013: External Affairs Minister Khurshid visits Singapore and addresses the Singapore India Chambers of Commerce and Industry (SICCI).


Sept. 8-10, 2013: External Affairs Minister Khurshid visits Laos for 7th India-Lao Joint Commission Meeting on Bilateral Cooperation and 2nd ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks (AINTT) Conference.

Oct. 9-10, 2013: PM Singh visits Brunei to attend the 8th East Asia Summit and the 11th ASEAN-India Summit.


Oct. 21-23, 2013: External Affairs Minister Khurshid visits the Philippines for the second India-Philippines Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation.


Nov. 1, 2013: External Affairs Minister Khurshid visits Australia to participate in the Indian Ocean Region Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) meeting in Perth. India concludes its chairmanship of the organization and Australia becomes chair.


Nov. 30-Dec. 5, 2013: State visit of emperor and empress of Japan to India.

Jan. 15-18, 2014: State visit of President Park Geun-hye of Republic of Korea to India.

Feb. 23-28, 2014: Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand visits historical and religious sites across India and meets Indian officials.


April 17, 2014: Third India-Vietnam Strategic Dialogue held in New Delhi.

April 23-26, 2014: India’s Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh visits Tokyo for bilateral consultations to “focus on the implementation of ideas and projects decided at the Annual Summits and maintain the momentum of the India-Japan Strategic and Global Partnership.”