

China-ASEAN Relations:

Regional Rivalries and Bilateral Irritants

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This quarter, China sought to enhance relations with mainland Southeast Asia by dispatching Defense Minister Chi Haotian to visit Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Nepal. Chi's trip was a follow-up to PRC President Jiang Zemin's visit late last year and was designed to enhance bilateral military cooperation. Chi's visit had the unintended consequence of drawing attention to possible Sino-Vietnamese rivalry and highlighting bilateral irritants. In maritime Southeast Asia, conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea surfaced once again as a major irritant in Sino-Philippines relations. Throughout the region, the activities of the Falun Gong religious movement attracted the ire of authorities in Beijing. Heavy-handed pressure by China, especially on the new government in Thailand, proved to be another irritant in bilateral relations.

Defense Minister Chi Does Southeast Asia

Laos. On his four-nation visit, Defense Minister Chi was accompanied by senior representatives from the Beijing, Chengdu, Guangzhou, and Nanjing military regions and deputy directors of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) General Armament Department and Foreign Affairs Office. Chi first visited Laos February 5-8 at the invitation of his counterpart, Lt. Gen. Choummali Sayasone. During his stay Chi met with the Lao president and prime minister.

General Chi's visit was clearly aimed at beefing up China's support for the modernization of the Lao People's Army and improving its capacity to deal with internal threats, especially from anti-regime Hmong rebels. On February 7, for example, Chi told Prime Minister Sisavath Keobounphanh that "China has always supported the Lao government in its efforts to modernize its military and maintain state security and social stability." In his meeting with President Khamtay Siphandone the two leaders agreed to "push forward Sino-Lao military ties to a new stage..."

Vietnam. Chi Haotian next visited Vietnam February 8-13 for discussions with his Vietnamese counterpart Pham Van Tra, President Tran Duc Luong, and Secretary General Le Kha Phieu. Chi's purpose was to further military cooperation in line with an agreement reached previously between Jiang Zemin and Le Kha Phieu. The two defense ministers reached agreement on "the framework for a series of military exchanges and strengthened cooperation on security matters." Both ministers also agreed "to strive to turn the common border into a peaceful, stable, and friendly border."

On February 9, as Chi met with Secretary General Phieu, *Saigon Giai Phong* newspaper, the organ of the Vietnam Communist Party in the south, reported that top officials, military commanders, and border guards were meeting at the behest of the Central Committee's Ideology and Culture Commission to discuss the defense of the Spratly Islands. The paper revealed for the first time that Vietnamese naval patrols reported nearly three hundred violations of Vietnamese territorial sovereignty in its Eastern Sea last year, including intrusions by fishing boats and as well as oil and gas exploration and exploitation activities on Vietnam's continental shelf.

Saigon Giai Phong reported that a new communications link had been established on Vietnamese-occupied features and that Vietnamese naval commanders had vowed to defend "every meter" of Vietnam's sea border. The report provoked a swift Chinese response. On February 13, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson declared that China was "seriously concerned" and demanded that Vietnam clarify the reports. According to the spokesperson, "Any unilateral act on Nansha (Spratly) Islands by any other country infringes upon the territorial integrity of China and is illegal and invalid."

Defense Minister Chi's visit came a month before the scheduled arrival of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Vietnam to discuss, among other things, the future of the Russian military presence at Cam Ranh Bay. Diplomatic observers reported that China had expressed an interest in the commercial development of Cam Ranh port and were keen to prevent the United States from establishing a presence there.

Immediately after Chi Haotian departed for Cambodia, Vietnam's Minister of National Defense, Pham Van Tra flew to Laos for discussions. Later, cash-strapped Vietnam announced it would provide military assistance to Laos. The visits by the Chinese and Vietnamese defense ministers to Laos must be placed in the context of a reported split in the Lao party leadership into pro-China and pro-Vietnam factions and the impending convocation of the Seventh National Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. Leadership changes announced at the congress indicated that a rise in the influence of the pro-China faction.

Cambodia. Chi Haotian visited Cambodia February 13-17, at the invitation of the co-ministers of defense, Tea Banh and Prince Sisowath Sereyrath. Chi also held separate discussions with all top Cambodian government officials and had an audience with King Sihanouk. Prime Minister Hun Sen requested a loan of \$12.5 million to assist in the demobilization of the Cambodian Army. Chi responded by promising to take this request back to Beijing for consideration, and he announced a grant of \$3.5 million to aid in the rehabilitation of the Preah Ket Mealea military hospital and Kampong Spoe provincial training center.

After discussions with Cambodia's leadership, Chi stated that there were no differences between the two countries and that China would support "the maintenance of national reconciliation and national sovereignty in Cambodia." Chi's reference to national reconciliation indicated that the question of an international tribunal to try Khmer Rouge

leaders for war crimes remained an irritant in bilateral relations. Diplomats based in Phnom Penh said China had been placing heavy pressure on Cambodia not to follow through on an agreement with the United Nations to set up such an international tribunal.

On February 8, prior to Chi's arrival in Phnom Pen, the Democratic Front of Khmer Students and Intellectuals issued a statement that read: "China must apologize in public to the Cambodian people for supporting the Khmer Rouge during their genocidal regime from 1975-1979." The Democratic Front also demanded that China pay compensation to each Cambodian victim of Khmer Rouge rule, and that China not play a role in the international tribunal. The Democratic Front took its demands to the Chinese embassy, which refused to accept its petition.

By most accounts, Hanoi and Beijing are competing for influence in Cambodia. The Cambodian media reported that Vietnam unsuccessfully pressed the Cambodia government to re-schedule a visit by President Tran Duc Luong prior to the arrival of China's defense minister. *Moneakseka Khmer* newspaper (February 2) speculated that Vietnam wanted to arrange for a public signing of a border treaty in the presence of King Sihanouk. *Samleng Yuveakchon* newspaper (February 15) argued that Chi's visit was designed to increase Chinese influence on the Hun Sen regime at Vietnam's expense, and gain Cambodia's support for China's position on territorial disputes in the South China Sea. *Chakkraval* newspaper (February 17) argued that China had two aims: neutralizing Vietnamese influence and undermining support for the international tribunal.

Thailand. Chi Haotian's February 17-20 visit to Thailand was added on to his itinerary once it was announced that his "old friend" Chavalit Youngchaiyudh would be appointed Thai defense minister. Although Chi's visit was billed a personal one, his agenda included meetings with all of the current and former top military brass. Chi and Chavalit discussed strengthening Sino-Thai security cooperation, drug suppression, and the ongoing dispute between Myanmar and Thailand. It was subsequently learned that one of China's main concerns was to solicit Thai support in curtailing the overseas activities of the Falun Gong movement (see below).

Singapore's Relations with Taiwan

Singapore's long-standing ties with Taiwan became an irritant in bilateral relations this quarter. In February, Singapore's second minister of defense, Teo Chee Hean, visited Beijing for discussions with Guo Boxiong, deputy chief of the PLA General Staff, on cooperation in the fields of politics, trade, and education. Teo also met with Vice President Hu Jintao and Fu Quanyou, chief of the PLA General Staff. Both Hu and Fu stressed their desire to see an increase in bilateral military contacts.

On February 19, Guo told Teo that China was opposed to any country that had diplomatic relations with the Beijing from developing official relations with Taipei. "We hope that the related countries shall keep alert for the political attempt of Taiwan authorities of splitting from the motherland, and observe one-China commitment," Guo said. Guo was referring to press reports that Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian was planning a

“vacation trip” to Singapore. On February 8, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson demanded that Singapore clarify reports concerning Chen’s proposed visit. Singapore denied that there were any such plans.

Guo was also referring to long-standing Singapore-Taiwan defense links that were now under discussion. In 1996, Taiwan agreed to host Singaporean infantry, armor, and artillery units for joint combat training and to maintain and repair tanks and Hawk missiles. Under a program known as Operation *Hsing Kuang* (Starlight), Singapore’s armed forces operate three training camps in Taiwan. In December 2000, Taiwan Navy Commander-in-Chief, General Le Chieh, reportedly made a “vacation trip” to Singapore. Later that month, Singapore’s chief of the General Staff visited Taiwan where he held discussions on their joint military training agreement. During the first week of January Taiwan’s minister of national defense, We Shih-wen, made an unpublicized trip to Singapore. It was in the context of these developments that in January, China used the occasion of the exchange of the first defense attachés with Singapore, to offer training facilities on Hainan Island. China had made a similar offer in 1999. It was later reported that Singapore had rejected Beijing’s offer and had decided to renew its training agreement with Taiwan.

South China Sea

Disputes in the South China Sea continue to create tension between China and the Philippines. On January 15, a Philippines Air Force plane sighted four Chinese fishing boats near Scarborough Shoal (Huangyan Island), approximately 120 nautical miles from Zambales province. The Philippines armed forces promptly dispatched planes and navy vessels to drive them off. This incident occurred as the new administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo settled into office. Throughout the first quarter, a number of incidents occurred that led officials on both sides to exchange claims, counter-claims, and diplomatic protests. But neither China nor the Philippines allowed this long-standing irritant to cause deterioration in bilateral relations.

Two further incidents heightened tensions. On February 1, the Philippine Navy boarded four Chinese fishing boats, confiscated their catch of endangered sea turtles, and ordered them to leave Philippine waters. The Chinese Embassy in Manila made representations to the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, while the Foreign Ministry in Beijing called in Philippine deputy chief of mission for a verbal dressing down. President Arroyo downplayed the incident by declaring, “We have always been saying that we don’t let this one small irritant affect the entire relationship.” Defense Secretary Orlando Mercado was promptly dispatched to Beijing for discussions.

The return of Chinese fishing vessels to Scarborough Shoal in mid-February led to a further round of recriminations. National Security Adviser Roilo Golez characterized the South China Sea dispute as the “number one threat to the security of the region.” On March 15, Foreign Affairs Secretary Teofisto Guingona summoned the Chinese Ambassador to deliver a *note verbale* expressing “grave concern” at the latest incursions. On the same day *BRP Quezon* boarded 10 Chinese fishing boats, and confiscated their

catch and nine crates of electrical blasting caps, time fuses, dynamite sticks, and cyanide tablets. A day later the Chinese Foreign Ministry summoned the Philippine Ambassador to China to protest Filipino actions. On March 19, National Security Adviser Golez filed a further protest with China over the growing number of Chinese boats in the Scarborough Shoal area. Golez claimed that since January 26 Chinese boats had entered Philippine waters. Matters escalated in late March when Foreign Affairs Under Secretary Baja stated publicly that the Philippines was considering imposing a ban on fishing in the disputed area.

The diplomatic flare up over Chinese fishing activity around Scarborough Shoal was diffused in late March when President Arroyo dispatched Alfonso Yuchengco as her special envoy to China. Yuchengco delivered a letter from President Arroyo to President Jiang and held discussions with Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Both sides expressed their resolve to settle the matter through consultation and dialogue and their willingness to promote bilateral relations through cooperation in such areas as trade and agriculture. The current problem of Scarborough Shoal was placed on the agenda for discussion by a bilateral committee on confidence building measures scheduled to meet in early April. Both Vice President Guingona and President Arroyo are scheduled to visit China in May and October, respectively, to attend the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and APEC forum where territorial disputes in the South China Sea are expected to be raised on the sidelines with Chinese officials.

Fishing is not the only point of contention. National Security Adviser Golez has charged that the “greatest threat” to national security came from Chinese gangs smuggling illegal drugs into the Philippines. Golez went on to allege that some members of the PLA were moonlighting and running drug manufacturing plants in China’s southern provinces. A day after these remarks the Chinese Embassy in Manila called on the Philippine government to exercise some restraint over Golez.

Falun Gong

The spread of the Falun Gong movement from mainland China to Chinese communities in Southeast Asia became a prominent issue in China’s bilateral relations as overseas adherents became more active. For example, 100 Falun Gong members gathered in Singapore on New Year’s eve 2000 to protest the deaths of movement followers while held in custody in Chinese jails. Falun Gong is a legally registered body in the island republic and has applied for legal recognition in Malaysia. Falun Gong members are also active in Thailand, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

On January 17, the Falun Gong branch in Thailand announced plans to convene a meeting of Falun Gong members from around the world in Bangkok on April 21-22. The local organizers stated that they had posted letters of invitation to Falun Gong coordinators in 40 countries after Singapore refused to sanction this meeting. This action by the Thai branch of Falun Gong promptly became a foreign policy issue for the new Thai Rak Thai government of Prime Minister Thaksin.

China has persistently pressured governments in Southeast Asia to ban or otherwise curb Falun Gong. In 1999 the Chinese government banned Falun Gong as an “evil cult.” In late 2000, China’s State Councilor Luo Gan urged the Thai government to ban Falun Gong in the course of discussions with Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand Paribatra. In January, China’s minister of public security informed his Thai counterpart that China was “concerned” about the planned meeting of Falun Gong members because of the potential to undermine Sino-Thai relations. In February, Defense Minister Chi raised Chinese concerns about Falun Gong in his discussions with Lao and Vietnamese officials. On February 6, Lao President Khamtay stated that his government “resolutely supported the Chinese government’s measures against Falun Gong.” Two days later President Tran Duc Luong told Chi that Vietnam understands the measures taken by China and believed that the Chinese government has “experience and capability in properly handling the issue.”

But it was the activities of the Falun Gong in Thailand that became a major irritant. According to Kavi Chongkittavon, a veteran commentator, China sensed that the Thaksin government presented a new opportunity and launched a diplomatic offensive at all levels. Chi reportedly put Falun Gong on the top of his agenda when he met with his counterpart, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh. According to Kavi, “This is the first time since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1975 that China has utilized every possible means in Thailand for a specific political purpose. As such it had opened a Pandora’s box in Thai-Chinese relations...”

Between January and late February, when Falun Gong announced their cancellation of plans to hold an international gathering, the Chinese government and its embassy in Bangkok went to great lengths to exert pressure on the Thaksin government. Local Chinese business groups were mobilized to parrot the official line that Falun Gong was an “evil cult” and its activities would not only hurt Sino-Thai relations but would destabilize Thai society as well. The Chinese government protested to the Thai embassy in Beijing, while the Chinese embassy in Bangkok called on the Thai government to ban the sect.

There were also hints of retaliation against Thai agricultural goods if Falun Gong were permitted to hold its planned international meeting in Bangkok. In mid-February the Agricultural Counselor at the Thai embassy in Beijing reported back to his ministry, “By allowing Falun Gong to hold its meeting in Thailand, Thai-Chinese relations could be adversely affected. In particular, the big volume of agricultural exports to China will be hurt.”

The Thai government was forced to walk a difficult tight rope. In public it declared that had not received an official request from Falun Gong to hold an international meeting; such a request would be considered on its merits and foreign attendees would need to apply for a visa. Thai government spokesmen reaffirmed their support for freedom of religion. At the same time, the Thai government restated its policy that it would not permit any activity that would affect national security or harm its bilateral relations. In private, various agencies of the Thai government all pressured Falun Gong to drop its

plans. Falun Gong members in northern Thailand were put under surveillance. The National Police warned it would not view sympathetically a request to hold an international meeting of Falun Gong supporters because it was threat to national security. The Department of Religious Affairs noted that Falun Gong was not one of the six approved religious doctrines. The Supreme Commander of the Thai Armed Forces even ordered military intelligence to gather information on the sect.

The New Thai Foreign Minister in China

The Thaksin government came to power with a pro-business mandate. The Falun Gong episode served to confirm that his government would downgrade human rights and democracy issues in its foreign policy. Nowhere was this new emphasis more apparent than Thailand's relations with China. Shortly after taking office, Surakiat Sathirathai, the new foreign minister, declared that Thailand would conduct diplomacy the "Asian way" of face saving and non-confrontation. "China is the first country I plan to visit outside ASEAN," he said, "because I consider itself will convey an important message that we greatly emphasize our ties with China." Surakiat launched a new initiative, pan-Asian cooperation in the form of an Asian Cooperation Dialogue linking Southeast Asia, East Asia, and South Asia in a loose multilateral dialogue forum.

Thai Foreign Minister Surakiat visited Beijing March 12-15 for discussions with his counterpart, Tang Jiaxuan, and President Jiang Zemin. When China's foreign minister noted that Falun Gong's activities were harmful to society and the country, Surakiat replied that Falun Gong had not carried out any such activities in Thailand. According to official press reports, "the two sides did not discuss the matter further."

Surakiat went to China with a full agenda. He carried a letter from Prime Minister Thaksin requesting that China continue to buy rice, rubber, and longans under special arrangements. Surakiat pressed the Chinese to pay special attention to developing relations between Thailand's Chiang Rai province and China's Yunnan province, and for China's agreement to join Thailand and Myanmar in tripartite efforts to suppress illegal drug traffic. Surakiat suggested the establishment of a Thai-Chinese Business Council to encourage the exchange of information among businessmen. He also asked China for equal treatment in aviation rights and for similar tax and tariff treatment accorded goods imported from Laos and Myanmar.

Surakiat's discussions led to agreement on the exchange of narcotics agents in their respective embassies. President Jiang indicated that China would continue to purchase Thai agricultural goods under special quota arrangements, even after China was admitted to the WTO. Jiang also agreed "in principle" to tripartite cooperation in suppressing the illegal drug trade but made it clear that no pressure would be put on Myanmar to participate. Jiang expressed concern over tensions in Thai-Myanmar relations. He was non-committal on commercial airline flights and tax waivers for Thai goods.

An editorial in the *Bangkok Post* (March 24) summed up the current state of Sino-Thai relations in this way: "By failing to resist the pressures, the government effectively

condoned an unhealthy inequality in the relationship that will foster a negative undercurrent, as well as confirmed its pro-business sympathies. No matter how big or strong, Beijing cannot be allowed to demand Thai respect for what it considers an internal affair when it does not reciprocate...China's insecurity about a domestic issue...is no argument for this government to weaken the defense of Thai values."

Conclusion

Since early 1999, China has moved methodically to put its long-term relations with Southeast Asia on a firm foundation through cooperative framework agreements. Economic ties form the heart of this new web. Developments during the first quarter of this year indicate that regional rivalry is still active in mainland Southeast Asia, especially between China and Vietnam for influence in Laos and Cambodia. Developments also revealed irritants in China's bilateral relations with regional states. The Falun Gong issue raises concerns that Chinese diplomatic actions have breached the long-standing regional norm of non-interference.

According to Kavi Chongkittavorn, ASEAN is concerned it is losing its bargaining power in dealing with Beijing and needs a unified approach. "The new U.S administration," he writes, "has not yet shown any appreciation of the situation in Southeast Asia...The new Thai government is repositioning itself to edge closer to China's strategic design. Chavalit may act with China to counter U.S. influence. The U.S. will encounter a less friendly Southeast Asia in the future." The Bush administration needs to quickly endorse the multilateral security initiatives espoused by CINCPAC Admiral Blair and reassure ASEAN states that Sino-American relations will not deteriorate to the extent of jeopardizing their relations with China.

Chronology of China-ASEAN Relations January-March 2001

Jan. 8-12, 2001: Thai Supreme Commander Gen. Sampao Choosri, on a visit to Hawaii to plan for the Cobra Gold 2001 exercise, informs his U.S. hosts that China and Vietnam have expressed an interest in sending observers to the exercise to be held in May.

Jan. 9-15, 2001: Henry Ying Tung Fok, Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), visits Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

Jan. 10-11, 2001: PRC Finance Minister Xiang Huaicheng visits Thailand, lectures on Asian free trade.

Jan. 13-14, 2001: Third Asia-Europe Finance Ministers meeting is held in Kobe, Japan.

Jan. 14-16, 2001: Cai Wu, Deputy Head of the CCP Central Committee International Liaison Department, visits Thailand.

Jan. 14-17, 2001: Vice Chairman Fok visits Vietnam.

Jan. 15, 2001: A Filipino patrol craft spots four Chinese fishing vessels anchored near Scarborough Shoal.

Jan. 15-16, 2001: ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan, and South Korea) officials meet in Kuala Lumpur to discuss the agenda for a new round of WTO global trade talks.

Jan. 18-19, 2001: Taiwan Foreign Affairs Minister Tien Hung-mao visits Thailand.

Jan. 20, 2001: Representatives from the Chambers of Commerce of Myanmar, China, Laos, and Thailand establish a Joint Economic Quadrangle Committee to boost trade and investment.

Feb. 1, 2001: China-Southeast Asia (Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) optic fiber cable service commences commercial operations.

Feb. 5-8, 2001: PRC Defense Minister Chi Haotian visits Laos.

Feb. 6, 2001: Philippine Presidential spokesperson announces that the new Arroyo government will continue to follow a “one-China policy.”

Feb. 6, 2001: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson asked the Philippines “to effectively respect the territorial sovereignty of China and strictly observe the consensus reached between the two sides on safeguarding regional stability in the South China Sea.”

Feb. 6-16, 2001: A delegation of the CCP Central Committee’s International Department, led by deputy head Wang Jiarui, visits North Korea, Vietnam, and Laos.

Feb. 8, 2001: *The Nation* (Bangkok) reports that Taiwan’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party has quietly opened a Southeast Asia branch office in Bangkok.

Feb. 9, 2001: *Saigon Giai Phong* reports on the deliberations of a meeting held to discuss security in Vietnam’s Eastern Sea and concludes “we must rapidly establish an administration for the islands to solve its administrative problems.”

Feb. 9-12, 2001: Minister Chi visits Vietnam.

Feb. 11-12, 2001: First Senior Officials Meeting of the Thirteenth APEC Ministerial Conference is held in Beijing.

Feb. 12, 2001: Philippine Defense Secretary Mercado visits China to discuss the Spratly Islands.

Feb. 13, 2001: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson reiterates that China holds indisputable sovereignty over the Nansha (Spratly) Islands and is “seriously concerned” over news reports that Vietnam will set up governmental bodies on the Nansha Islands.

Feb. 13-17, 2001: Minister Chi visits Cambodia.

Feb. 14, 2001: Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab addresses U.S. House of Representative’s committee on security and foreign affairs. He notes that “Indonesia should also be able to use (the position of China) to improve our relations as well as our diplomacy. Moreover, in the United Nations, China always backs our position in dealing with East Timor and human rights. Economically, China is also a good partner for Indonesia in particular for the developing of tourism industry.”

Feb. 15-Mar. 2, 2001: The Vietnam-China Border Demarcation Joint committee holds its second meeting in Hanoi to further implement the 1999 Border Treaty.

Feb. 17, 2001: Thai Rak Thai party forms a coalition government and a new cabinet.

Feb. 17-20, 2001: Minister Chi pays personal visit to Thai Defense Minister Chavalit Youngchaiyudh.

Feb. 19-22, 2001: Singapore’s second minister for defense, Teo Chee Han, visits China for discussions with his counterpart Chi Haotian, among others.

Feb. 21, 2001: *Jane’s Defense Weekly* reports that the Myanmar Navy in cooperation with Chinese engineers has installed a new radar station on Zadetkale Island (St. Luke’s) opposite Thailand’s Ranong province.

Feb. 23, 2001: The Philippine Navy is put on alert because of reports that China may be planning to secretly build structures on the disputed Scarborough Shoal.

Feb. 26, 2001: China’s Vice Premier Qian Qichen and Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Manh Cam meet prior to the opening of the Boao Forum for Asia on Hainan Island.

Feb. 26-27, 2001: The inaugural meeting of Boao Forum of Asia is held in Boao, China.

Mar. 5-7, 2001: Third meeting of China-ASEAN Joint Cooperation Committee is held in Chengdu, Sichuan province.

Mar. 8, 2001: Li Chengren, executive vice chairman of the Chinese Association for International Understanding and member of the CCP Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, leads a seven-member delegation to Myanmar at the invitation of Lt-Gen Win Myint, SPDC Secretary-3.

Mar. 12-14, 2001: Seventh National Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party is held in Vientiane. Luo Gan, head of the CCP delegation, meets separately with leaders of the Vietnam Communist Party, Cambodian People's Party.

Mar. 13, 2001: The *BRP Quezon* interdicts 10 Chinese fishing vessels near Scarborough Shoal and seizes 50 giant clam shells (called locally *taklobos*), several sacks of meat, and nine boxes of electrical blasting caps, time fuses, dynamite sticks, and cyanide tablets.

Mar. 14, 2001: Philippines authorities scramble military aircraft to track the movement of two Chinese boats off Scarborough Shoal.

Mar. 19-22, 2001: Taipei Mayor Ma Ying-jeou visits Singapore.

Mar. 21, 2001: It is announced that Philippine President Arroyo and Vice President Guingona will visit China to discuss territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Mar. 21, 2001: Thai Deputy PM Pitak Intrawitayanunt states that his government supports China's early accession to the WTO.

Mar. 22, 2001: *The Philippine Star* reports China's concern over ongoing trilateral naval exercises, *Marsea 01*, being conducted by the Philippines, Thailand, and the U.S.

Mar. 22-25, 2001: New Thai FM Surakiat Sathianthai visits China for discussions with his counterpart Tang Jiaxuan.

Mar. 23, 2001: ASEAN Secretary General Rodolfo Severino states that ASEAN supports the entry of both China and Taiwan into the World Trade Organization.

Mar. 26-29, 2001: Chea Sim, president of the Cambodian Senate, meets with President Jiang and Premier Li Peng in China.

Mar. 27, 2001: ASEAN Plus Three officials adopt a common examination to certify information technology experts.

Mar. 27, 2001: ASEAN senior economic officials and ASEAN Plus Three senior trade officials meet in Kuala Lumpur.

Mar. 27, 2001: Alfonso Yuchengco, Philippine special presidential envoy, visits Beijing, meets with Premier Zhu and Vice FM Wang Yi, and delivers letter from President Arroyo to President Jiang.

Mar. 28, 2001: Third China-ASEAN Joint Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation meeting in Kuala Lumpur, approves the establishment of the China-ASEAN Expert Group on Economic Cooperation.

Mar. 28, 2001: UN Environment Program announces that Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam have signed their first agreement to protect Southeast Asia's marine resources.

Mar. 30, 2001: An Min, China's vice minister of foreign trade and economic cooperation, visits Cambodia.