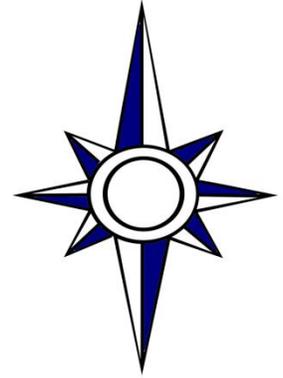


Comparative Connections

A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations



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India-East Asia Relations:

A Full Year of “Acting East”

India-East Asia relations during 2015 offered a perspective on the first full year of India “Acting East” since Prime Minister Modi took office in May 2014 and announced in November that his administration would turn the two decade-old “Look East Policy” into an “Act East Policy.” In 2015, India took important steps to shore up ties with several Asia-Pacific countries while also creating new [relationships](#). For example, Modi made the first-ever visit by an Indian prime minister to Mongolia, Vice President Hamid Ansari was dispatched to Brunei, North Korea’s foreign minister for the first time visited India, India opened its new mission to ASEAN with a dedicated ambassador, and the first India-Australia-Japan trilateral dialogue took place in June. While India-East Asia relations saw no ground-breaking developments, Modi continues to emphasize the political and strategic dimensions of India’s East Asia outreach – particularly in the maritime domain. Indeed, the Modi administration released its end-of-year assessment of the “Act East Policy,” noting the “policy which was originally conceived as an economic initiative, has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions including establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation.” The review went on to highlight the fact that “India has upgraded its relations to strategic partnership with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, Republic of Korea (ROK), Australia, Singapore and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)...” In an official review of India’s foreign relations entitled *A Year of Smart Diplomacy: Milestones 2015*, released by the Modi administration on Dec. 22, the section on “Act East Policy: Vision, Vigour and Plan of Action” followed discussion of “Neighborhood Diplomacy” and before “Engaging Major Powers” – providing a perspective on the priority that the Modi administration has been giving to East Asia.

India-China: Modi’s first visit to China as prime minister

The big event of bilateral India-China relations in 2015 was Prime Minister Modi’s May visit to China, the first since being elected to office a year earlier (Modi had visited China while chief minister of Gujarat state.) Little was achieved by Modi’s visit and no progress was made on key long-standing “knots” in the relationship such as border/territorial disputes and unbalanced trade.

The year began inauspiciously when, in February, China summoned India’s ambassador in Beijing to protest Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Arunachal Pradesh to open a new railroad line.

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China considers the area to be disputed territory. Modi stuck to India's basic position that border/territorial disputes hold the two countries "back from realizing [the] full potential of our partnership" and "suggested that China should take a strategic and long term view of our relations." He claimed to have "found the Chinese leadership responsive" (though he did not characterize the nature of the response). Finally, Modi [reiterated](#) the need for clarification of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Meanwhile, the press in both countries continued to highlight their respective narratives: Chinese media emphasized India's "aggressive patrolling resulting in tensions" and Indian media highlighted alleged Chinese incursions into India's territory. India's government sought to explain its version of the situation through several parliamentary interventions. For example, in a May 5 written response to a member of Parliament's Upper House, Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar declared "There have been no incidents of infiltration by Chinese soldiers into Indian territory during last three years." He went on to explain that there "is no commonly delineated Line of Actual Control (LAC)..." and "[d]ue to both sides undertaking patrolling upto [sic] their perception of the LAC, transgressions do occur." The 18th round of Special Representative Talks on the India-China Border Question was held on March 23, but without any progress. At the end of the year, a news report emerged that Indian and Chinese officials would hold a small, [tactical exercise at the contested border](#) itself near Chushul during the coming weeks. Also at the end of the year, Parrikar told Parliament that apart from utilizing established mechanisms to manage border relations, "two additional [Border Personnel Meeting points](#) has been operationalized in 2015." Still, India-China border relations now seem less about immediate resolution of territorial dispute and more about managing incidents.

Despite a lack of progress on the border issue, numerous military and defense exchanges and discussions were held throughout the year. In April, the seventh China-India Defense and Security Consultation was held in Beijing. The head of the Indian delegation, Defense Secretary R. K. Mathur, [expressed hope](#) that "both the Indian and Chinese militaries would take effective measures to jointly control the situations in the India-China border area so as to maintain peace and tranquility of the area." In October, the fifth in the series of India-China Combined Military Training Exercise *Hand-in-Hand* was held at the Kunming Military Academy in Yunnan. In mid-November, Gen. Fan Changlong, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, visited India, making him the highest-ranking Chinese military official visit to India in a decade. In December, Lt. Gen. D.S. Hooda, Army commander of India's Northern Command, led a six-member delegation to Beijing to meet Gen. Qi Jianguo, deputy chief of the General Staff.

Commercial relations remained robust, but plagued by a large Indian trade deficit. Indian officials continued to insist that the cause of the deficit lay with restrictions in China. Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar said on the eve of PM Modi's May visit that "[t]here are many areas where India is globally competitive but somehow we have not been able to be successful in the Chinese market." He specifically highlighted Indian pharmaceuticals and IT-enabled services. He [suggested](#) a "solution to trade has to be found by more enlightened regulatory practices which would create a better trade balance." China's view was of course quite different. China's Ambassador to India Le Yuchung [explained](#) "China takes the Indian concern of trade imbalance very seriously. Solving the problem requires joint efforts. China hopes India would ease restrictions on exporting competitive products such as iron ore etc. to China, cut tariffs, encourage Indian firms to improve the quality of their products and produce more goods that meet the demand of the Chinese market."

India-Japan: Prime Ministers Modi and Abe continue their bromance

The amicable personal relationship between Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo continued with the big development in 2015 being Abe's December visit to New Delhi. A Joint Statement issued during the visit captured the highly aspirational element of the budding bilateral relationship: *Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World*. The contrast with the pallid title of the India-China Joint Statement in May is worth noting (*Joint Statement between the India and China during Prime Minister's visit to China*).

The signing of an agreement on civil nuclear energy cooperation that had been under negotiation since 2010 was also announced during the visit. While a previous article in this series reported the speeding up of negotiations ("India-East Asia Relations: Acting East Under Prime Minister Modi?", *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 16, No. 3, January 2015), the announcement of an agreement is significant even though no details are publicly available and the joint statement indicates that "this Agreement will be signed after the technical details are finalized, including those related to the necessary internal procedures." Just what the internal procedures are and how long this process will take was a subject of questioning by Indian media – which was given only vague replies by government officials. More significant was how Prime Minister Modi sought to frame the agreement, emphasizing its political rather than commercial or environmental importance. In Modi's [words](#), "The Memorandum we signed on civil nuclear energy cooperation is more than just an agreement for commerce and clean energy. It is a shining symbol of a new level of mutual confidence and strategic partnership in the cause of a peaceful and secure world. I know the significance of this decision for Japan. And, I assure you that India deeply respects that decision and will honour our shared commitments." Precisely what the mutual commitments are have not been made publicly available. No doubt an Indian decision to test a nuclear device (casting aside its own voluntary moratorium on tests) would lead Japan to at least suspend any Japanese civilian nuclear cooperation.

A fact sheet on the India-Japan relationship released during Prime Minister Abe's visit began with a review of political dialogues and security cooperation. There are now various annual dialogues between the two countries including between the foreign ministers, defense ministers, national security advisors and secretariats, a 2 + 2 dialogue at the foreign/defense secretaries- and vice minister-level, and of course the trilateral US-Japan-India dialogue. A notable new development is the inauguration of an India-Japan-Australia trilateral dialogue, the first of which was held in June 2015.

Security cooperation is also proceeding with three important developments: the signing of an agreement on the protection of classified military information, agreement on the transfer of defense equipment and technology, and confirmation that Japan would become a "regular participant at the *Malabar* exercises, which generally take place between India and the United States." India and Japan also agreed to begin staff talks between the two countries' air forces starting in 2016. However, there were no new announcements on defense sales. The [joint statement](#) noted only that "The two Prime Ministers express their intention to explore potential future projects on defense equipment and technology cooperation such as the US-2 amphibian

aircraft.” The first meeting of a newly formed Joint Working Group on Defense Equipment and Technology Cooperation had been held in March during the visit to Tokyo by Defense Minister Parrikar—his first visit abroad since being named to the position.

Economic relations continued to focus on the huge development assistance efforts of Japan in the country, including a new fund labeled the “Japan-India Make in India Fund” and financing for a *Shinkansen* train service between Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Also, to stimulate commercial ties and recognize what Indian officials lauded as “the importance of Japan and the uniqueness of this relationship,” it was announced that India had “decided that Japanese visitors to India – all visitors, business, tourists, all of them – could avail a visa on arrival,... So, this would be the only country for whom that arrangement would apply.” The visa on arrival service for Japan is set to commence in March 2016. Japan also expressed support for India’s membership in APEC.

India-Japan relations show a steady upward trajectory as there has been more focus on political, strategic, and defense cooperation while the bonhomie and symbolism have been taken higher under the leaderships of Prime Minister Modi and Abe.

India and the two Koreas

In 2015, India had important interactions with both North and South Korea. In April, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong led a delegation to India, the first-ever such bilateral visit. In addition to meeting with India’s Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj and other officials, Ri was accorded a meeting with Vice President Ansari. An official Indian statement on the visit noted that the “Foreign Minister level talks were held in a frank and friendly atmosphere where issues of mutual interest including India’s security concerns came up for discussion.” Given past reports of North Korea-Pakistan missile and nuclear cooperation, it is possible that this was one of “India’s security concerns” discussed. India’s foreign minister explicitly “conveyed to her Korean counterpart the significance of peace and stability in the Korean peninsula for India’s Act East policy.” The drivers on North Korea’s side for the visit are far less clear, but the official readout notes that the DPRK foreign minister “expressed his country’s appreciation for the humanitarian assistance provided by India ... [and] sought additional assistance.” However, India was noncommittal, agreeing to “positively consider DPRK’s request.” Swaraj also “thanked her counterpart for the invitation” to visit Pyongyang, but did not immediately accept the invitation. Later in September, news reports in India noted that India’s Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju attended a North Korean Independence Day celebration in New Delhi and speculated that there might be some change in India-North Korea relations. To date, however, no major changes have been announced.

More substantive though less intriguing was Prime Minister Modi’s May state visit to Seoul, which followed visits by the speaker of South Korea’s parliament to India in the same month and an earlier visit by India’s defense minister to South Korea in mid-April for the annual ROK-India Defense Ministerial Meeting. The focus of Modi’s visit was commercial relations as well as broad political-security ties. During the visit, a 27-point *Joint Statement for Special Strategic Partnership* was signed; a statement that was substantively somewhere between the statements signed by India with China and Japan during the year. There were several elements in the statement regarding bilateral political-security relations. Perhaps most notably, both “shared the

view that bilateral defense and security cooperation has a large potential to grow”; suggesting a shared commitment but also the fact that such ties are quite undeveloped. In order to develop these ties, the two sides agreed to “establish annual Summit meetings,... hold Foreign Minister-led Joint Commission meetings annually, strengthen partnerships between their respective defense education institutions, establish a joint Vice Ministerial-level defense and foreign affairs dialogue in the “2+2 Format,” and commence staff level talks between the two navies and regular exchanges among their armed forces. A specific MoU was signed for cooperation between India’s National Security Council Secretariat and the ROK’s Office of National Security. On the defense side, during Defense Minister Parrikar’s April visit to Seoul for the ROK-India Defense Ministerial Meeting, he had spoken to a gathering of the India-Korea Defence Industry Forum and invited South Korean defense companies to participate in India’s defense industry. He also met the “top management of Hyundai Heavy Industries and invited them to become strategic partners for India’s defence and commercial shipping sectors.”

The most notable element on the economic side was Prime Minister Modi admitting that the reason South Korea ranks only 14th as a source of foreign direct investment (FDI) flows into India “lies with us not with you” and announcing the formation of a “dedicated mechanism for hand holding of Korean investors. It will be known as Korea Plus.”

India-Mongolia

Prime Minister Modi made a first-ever visit by an Indian PM to Mongolia in May 2015, marking 60 years of diplomatic relations. The [two countries also signed](#) a new *Strategic Partnership Joint Statement*. Specifically, Modi said “We attach high importance to our security cooperation. We will continue to participate in each other’s defence exercises. The agreements today will deepen our cooperation in border security and cyber security. Cooperation between National Security Councils will provide a strategic framework for cooperation. We have also agreed that India will help establish a cyber security centre in Mongolia’s defence and security establishment.” Earlier, on Jan. 23, the 10th India-Mongolia Joint Training Exercise focusing on respective army operating procedures in counter insurgency and terrorism scenario was held in Gwalior, India.

On the commercial front, Prime Minister Modi [announced](#) “India will provide a Line of Credit of One Billion U.S. dollars to support expansion of Mongolia’s economic capacity and infrastructure.” In a speech to Mongolia’s parliament, Modi said “Mongolia’s rich mineral resources can fuel our partnership. And, I hope that location will not be a constraint on Mongolia’s right to choose its partners.”

India-Southeast Asia

India’s relations with Southeast Asia during 2015 were active both at the bilateral and multilateral level. Importantly, on April 23, India inaugurated a new mission to ASEAN including a dedicated ambassador. Foreign Minister Swaraj [stated](#) that the action shows a “strong resolve to match the expectations of our friends in the region for India to play a more proactive role. I am confident that in the coming days, our Mission to ASEAN will bring more focus, objectivity, synergy and speed to our engagement with ASEAN and the ASEAN-centric processes...” The statement directly addressed some of the long-standing complaints from the

ASEAN side about India's interactions with the region. Swaraj also took the opportunity to note that India had "just ratified the ASEAN-India Trade-in-Services and Investment Agreements, signed last year [September]." She urged all remaining ASEAN states "to also complete their respective domestic internal processes at the earliest, paving the way for the entry into force of both Agreements later this year. She further declared India was "committed to engaging ourselves in constructive discussions on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which involves ASEAN and its six dialogue partners, to ensure its early fruition with a balanced outcome in goods and services." As has been discussed in earlier articles in this series, several parties to RCEP negotiations have viewed India as a difficult negotiator, primarily given its concerns over its large bilateral trade deficit with China.

During a gathering of Southeast Asian and ASEAN officials in India for the Seventh Delhi Dialogue, EAM Swaraj, focused on the overall state of economic relations saying:

The signing of a FTA in Goods in 2009 has given a spurt to bilateral trade. However, we need to make a special effort to achieve our target of enhancing trade to US\$ 100 billion by 2015, and our aspiration to double it to US\$ 200 billion by 2022. We will have to significantly augment the utilisation level of the Agreement on Trade in Goods and further liberalise the tariff lines. I am glad that the process has started to revive the ASEAN-India Trade Negotiations Committee to kick-start these discussions. Investment flows are also substantial both ways, with ASEAN accounting for approximately 12.5% of investment flows into India since 2000. FDI outflows from India to ASEAN countries over the last 7 years were over US\$ 31 billion while FDI equity inflows into India from ASEAN countries during this period were over US\$ 25 billion.

In November, Prime Minister Modi attended the 10th East Asia Summit and the 13th India-ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur. An ASEAN-India plan of action for 2016-2020 entitled "Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity" has been formulated. Two key highlights include a \$1 billion line of credit to promote projects that support physical and digital connectivity to transform the corridors of connectivity into corridors of economic growth and prosperity" and a specific statement on maritime security: "With maritime security becoming increasingly pivotal to secure global sea lanes of communication, India underlined its shared commitment with ASEAN towards freedom of navigation, over flight and unimpeded commerce, in accordance with accepted principles of international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea."

India-Myanmar relations

The main event in India-Myanmar relations in 2015 occurred on June 9 when India launched a Special Forces operation against the anti-India insurgent group the National Socialist Council of Nagaland's Khaplang faction (NSCN-K) following a June 4 attack that killed 18 and injured 14 Indian Army soldiers. There remain differing media reports and government statements on whether India's operation was conducted along the border in Manipur state or across the border into Myanmar. In any case, the incident triggered a series of high-level exchanges including the June 17 visit of India's Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval to Myanmar for consultations with the government. Some news reports assert that Nay Pyi Taw rejected an Indian request for joint operations against the NSCN-K, but these have not been officially clarified by either country. The two sides have negotiated various arrangements for

border cooperation including the exchange of information and intelligence, meetings of local commanders and coordinated patrols on their respective territories along the border. Border relations were further discussed when Myanmar's Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin visited India in mid-July for the Joint Consultative Commission and specifically called on Prime Minister Modi. Later in the same month Sr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of Myanmar Defence Services, also called on Modi, whose office released a statement saying "Sr. Gen. U Min Aung Hlaing expressed his commitment to deepen defence and security engagement with India, including in the maritime security domain. He added that Myanmar will remain an important platform in support of India's Act East Policy."

While the June incident and the follow-up visits were the key events in India-Myanmar relations during 2015, not all major interactions were tied to it. For example, earlier in January, Myanmar's First Vice President Sai Mauk Kham paid a visit to New Delhi during which President Pranab Mukherjee reiterated India's commitment of \$5 million for border area development under an existing MoU, and noted that \$4.5 million had already been released.

Following Myanmar's national elections Prime Minister Modi congratulated Aung San Suu Kyi after her party, National League for Democracy (NLD), won a majority in the landmark Myanmar elections and tweeted that "India will be delighted to welcome her" for a visit.

India-Singapore: "renewed spirit, new energy"

India-Singapore relations in 2015 were bookended by two important visits. President Tony Tang became the first Singapore head of state to visit since 2003 to mark the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations. India used the visit to [reiterate](#) "Singapore's role as [India's] gateway to ASEAN." Much of India's focus with Singapore remains on ties "that will directly feed into [India's] development process." President Mukherjee also invited Singapore to participate in his country's "Make in India," "Digital India," and "Clean India" campaigns. Among the specific focus areas were smart cities, urban rejuvenation, skill development, connectivity, coast and port development, strengthening linkages with the Northeast of India, projects to scale up investments in new development initiatives, and enhancing exchanges with the individual states of India. Many of these aspects of bilateral ties were developed further when Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan visited India in October to co-chair the fourth India-Singapore Joint Ministerial Committee (JCM) Meeting.

The capstone bilateral interaction of the year occurred in late November when Prime Minister Modi made an official visit to Singapore, the second since becoming prime minister (he earlier attended the funeral of Lee Kwan Yew). A Joint Statement on the Strategic Partnership issued during the visit was entitled "Renewed Spirit, New Energy" and its lead subject was "Political, Defense and Security Cooperation." Within this framework, the two countries "decide[d] to expand cooperation in maritime security" including operationalizing a *Technical Agreement on the Sharing of White-Shipping Information between the Indian Navy and the Republic of Singapore Navy* that was signed during Indian Navy Chief R. K. Dhowan's earlier visit to Singapore in July 2015. The two sides also "looked forward to greater bilateral Coast Guard Cooperation." A non-defense maritime initiative announced in the context of the Joint Statement's section on "Speeding up air and maritime connectivity and coastal development"

was a first-ever “India-Singapore Maritime Conference to be held in India in early 2016 with the participation of key players in the maritime sector...”

The bilateral economic relationship remains robust with Singapore retaining its place as India’s largest trade partner (with trade doubling since 2005 to \$17 billion) and investment partner in ASEAN and second largest source of *all* foreign investment into India – about 12 percent of total FDI into India since 2000. Singapore remains India’s most important destination for investment abroad with a stock of approximately \$33 billion in total investment. During Modi’s November visit the two countries “aspired to further double trade.”

India-Malaysia

Prime Minister Modi’s November visit to Malaysia encompassed both a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Najib Razak and participation in the 10th East Asia Summit and the 13th ASEAN-India Summit.

Twelve of the 43-point Joint Statement on “Enhanced Malaysia-India Strategic Partnership” covered defense and security cooperation. Specific initiatives included upgrading the three year-old *Harimau Shakti* exercises “to company level, and subsequently to tri-services exercises...”, agreeing to build on long-standing cooperation on *SU-30* fighter aircraft by “building on the assistance by India for successful completion of the *SU-30* MKM training programme by Indian pilots in Malaysia,” and agreeing to “institute annual talks between the Heads of the Indian Coast Guards and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency including during the Head of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM).” This existing and intended cooperation builds on recent Indian support “in the search operations for the missing MH370 airliner through the deployment of six ships and seven aircraft, including at Subang airbase in Malaysia.”

India-Indonesia

Except for a brief visit in April by External Affairs Minister Swaraj to attend the Asian African Summit and inaugurate the Indian Mission to ASEAN, the main bilateral interaction between India and Indonesia was the visit of Vice President Ansari in early November. In a speech entitled “Indonesia and India: Companion Souls, Strategic Partners”, Ansari interestingly focused heavily on the countries’ shared maritime history, interests and prospects for cooperation. He began by noting that “We are important maritime neighbours, whose relations are rooted in civilizational links that share similar perceptions of the evolving maritime environment in the region and the world at large.” He offered specific cooperation in saying “We are ready to support technology transfer and joint ventures for building medium size vessels to contribute to the Maritime Policy of Indonesia. We are ready to support through hydrographic surveys and institutionalized cooperation.” Specifically related to security cooperation, Ansari suggested that “Given the growing volume of our maritime trade and given that we share a common maritime boundary along the Andaman Sea; we are natural partners in ensuring the development and security of the Indian Ocean and the pacific littoral region.”

On the economic front, officials traveling with the vice president noted that Indonesia has emerged as the second largest trading partner of India in the ASEAN region with trade

increasing five-fold (from \$4.3 billion to \$20 billion) during the past decade. Indonesia's Vice President Jusuf Kalla [suggested](#) increasing trade to \$25 billion. India's investments of about \$15 billion are said to have created about 250,000 jobs in Indonesia.

India-Brunei

Vice President Ansari's early November visit to Brunei marked the highest-level visit ever to promote bilateral relations. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh participated in the 11th ASEAN-India Summit and the 8th East Asia Summit held in Brunei in 2013, but there was no bilateral meeting. The importance of Brunei is that it is the source of \$1 billion in crude oil to India annually, and an Indian diaspora of about 10,000 resides there. Moreover, Brunei was the India-ASEAN coordinator from 2013-2015. For Brunei, India is the third largest destination for exports, contributing about 10 percent of the total exports of Brunei. Brunei has also expressed support for India's candidacy for permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

India-Philippines

Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert Del Rosario visited India for the third Joint Commission Meeting on Bilateral Relations in October. Of the 25-point [joint statement issued](#) during the visit, three comparatively lengthy and substantive points focused on maritime perspectives and interactions between the two countries. Specifically,

Ministers expressed satisfaction at the deepening defence cooperation especially in exchanges in military training and education, capacity building, and regular goodwill visits by Indian Naval Ships to the Philippines. Both sides agreed to further strengthen defence and security cooperation in the areas of maritime domain awareness, intelligence sharing, capability building, White Shipping and defence production. The Ministers expressed satisfaction at the regular INTELLEX meeting and looked forward to the convening of the 2nd meeting of the India-Philippines Joint Defense Cooperation Committee (JDCC) in India.

India-Thailand

External Affairs Minister Swaraj travelled to Thailand at the end of June to co-chair the seventh meeting of the India-Thailand Joint Commission (JCM) and to attend the 16th World Sanskrit Conference. This marked the first high-level official visit between the two countries since the new governments took office in New Delhi and Bangkok.

India-Cambodia

Vice President Ansari visited Cambodia in mid-September at the invitation of Prime Minister Hun Sen. Ansari announced that India was going to increase the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) slots for Cambodia from 17 to 25 and agreed to seriously look at Cambodia's request to soften the terms of two existing credit lines that India had offered earlier so that Cambodia could utilize them. He also noted that Cambodia reaffirmed support for India for permanent membership of the UN Security Council and expressed his thanks.

India-Laos

In mid-September, Vice President Ansari also visited Laos where he signed two MoUs. The first is an Air Services Agreement primarily to promote tourism on the Buddhist Circuit including Bodh Gaya. The second MoU is an umbrella agreement for quick impact projects as part of the India-CLMV Quick Impact Projects Revolving Fund.

India-Vietnam

The main event of India-Vietnam relations during 2015 was the May signing of a Joint Vision Statement on Defense Cooperation covering the period 2015-2020. This statement builds on a “Security Dialogue” that was initiated in 2003. In 2007, India and Vietnam signed a Joint Declaration on the ‘Establishment of a Strategic Partnership’ and in 2009, an MoU on Defense Cooperation. These documents have laid the foundation for strengthening overall defense and particularly maritime cooperation between the two countries.

The Joint Vision Statement was signed between the countries’ defense ministers after talks in New Delhi. A bilateral MoU on cooperation between the coast guards was also signed. In October, India’s naval ship *INS Sahyadri* made a four-day visit to Da Nang as part of its “operational deployment” to the South China Sea and the Northwest Pacific region. The last Indian ship visit to Vietnam occurred in 2014 to Hai Phong port.

Apart from defense relations, from 2015 until 2018, Vietnam will be the country coordinator for relations between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India.

India-Australia

India-Australia relations witnessed important activity in 2015. In April, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop visited India for the 10th India-Australia Foreign Ministers Framework Dialogue, but also for separate meetings with India’s minister of finance and minister of defense. She also inaugurated a new Australian Consulate-General in Chennai and marked the Silver Jubilee of the Indo-Australian Chamber of Commerce. In June, India, Japan, and Australia held their first trilateral dialogue. In September, Defense Minister Kevin Andrews visited India to attend the second India-Australia Defense Ministers dialogue. Discussions were held on subjects including intelligence sharing, combating international terrorism, cyber security, and better working relations between the two countries for border and maritime security. In October, India’s Chief of Naval Staff, R.K. Dhowan, visited Australia to attend the annual “Sea Power Conference” and to hold discussions with senior Australian Navy officials to “consolidate existing maritime cooperation initiatives as well as explore new avenues.” The two countries held their first bilateral maritime exercise *AUSINDEX* off India’s eastern coast in September. Earlier, in June, two ships of the Indian Navy’s Eastern Fleet called on the port of Fremantle, Perth. These ships had been on an operational deployment to the South Indian Ocean and South China Sea since mid-May 2015.

At the end of December 2015, India’s Union Cabinet was apprised of the “administrative arrangements for implementing the India-Australia Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement that

came into force on 13th November 2015.” India is expected to gain from the fuel supply arrangements with Australia in order to expand the use of nuclear power in India.

India-South Pacific

Prime Minister Modi continued his outreach to the South Pacific since his 2014 visit to Fiji – the first by an Indian prime minister since 1981. In August 2015, India invited the heads of 14 island countries to the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) summit in Jaipur India. President Mukherjee, during a meeting with heads of government, declared that Pacific Island countries are a key factor in India’s extended Act East Policy. Much of the focus was on economic and technical cooperation in areas such as agriculture, food processing, fisheries, solar energy, and e-networked telemedicine and tele-education.

Conclusions

India-East Asia relations during the first full year of Prime Minister Modi’s “Act East” policy were robust and wide-ranging with some unusual outreach as well. By its own metrics, priorities and interests, India did in fact “Act East.” The regional response to India continues to be welcoming and hopeful that India can sustain, deepen and expand ties. Of particular importance during the past year was the increased focus on political and strategic elements of India’s East Asia relations, including in the maritime area. This emphasis adds to what began in the first six months of the Modi administration as a focus on commercial and development priorities with East Asian countries. This shift in emphasis may reflect the fact that domestic Indian economic reform continues to face constraints and obstacles that are not present in India’s external political and security relations. Given the more sensitive and troubled security environment in East Asia, especially maritime disputes, India’s East Asia engagement reflects an effort to take advantage of opportunities to develop mutually beneficial relations using the political and security tools that are more easily available to India and applicable to East Asia.

Chronology of India-East Asia Relations January 2015 – December 2015

Jan. 16-18, 2015: Japan’s Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio visits India for the eighth India-Japan Foreign Ministers’ Strategic Dialogue and gives a major policy speech at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA).

Jan. 19-23, 2015: Myanmar’s First Vice President Sai Mauk Kham visits India with a high-level delegation of Cabinet ministers and deputy ministers.

Feb. 1-3, 2015: External Affairs Minister Shushma Swaraj travels to China for the 13th Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation, the People’s Republic of China, and India.

Feb. 8-11, 2015: President Tony Tan of Singapore makes a state visit to India.

March 11-12, 2015: India hosts the seventh Delhi Dialogue, a track 1.5 gathering of Indian, Southeast Asian, and ASEAN secretariat officials and experts.

March 14, 2015: The 17th ASEAN-India Senior Officials meeting is held in Delhi to follow up on the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and discuss the Plan of Action for 2016-2021 for ASEAN-India cooperation.

April 10, 2015: Defense Secretary R.K. Mathur visits China for the seventh China-India Defense and Security Consultation and meets State Councilor and Defense Minister Chang Wanquan.

April 12-14, 2015: North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong visits India, the first ever visit from the DPRK to India, and meets Vice President Hamid Ansari.

April 12-15, 2015: Australia's Foreign Minister Julie Bishop visits India for the 10th India-Australia Foreign Ministers Framework Dialogue, and also has separate meetings with India's minister of finance and minister of defense.

Apr 16, 2015: Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar visits Seoul to co-chair the India-ROK Defense Ministerial Meeting.

April 21-24, 2015: EAM Swaraj visits Indonesia for the Asian African Summit and inaugurates the Indian Mission to ASEAN.

May 14-16, 2015: Prime Minister Narendra Modi makes his first visit to China since being elected prime minister.

May 17, 2015: PM Modi becomes the first Indian prime minister to visit Mongolia; he addresses the Mongolian parliament.

May 18-19, 2015: PM Modi visits South Korea and meets President Park Geun-hye.

May 20, 2015: Tommy Koh, co-chair of the India-Singapore Strategic Dialogue, leads a delegation to India and meets PM Modi.

June 17, 2015: Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval travel to Myanmar to meet government officials following a June 9 Indian military action to attack insurgents along the shared border.

June 27-29, 2015: EAM Swaraj travels to Thailand to co-chair the seventh meeting of the India-Thailand Joint Commission (JCM) and to attend the 16th World Sanskrit Conference.

July 14-17, 2015: Myanmar's Minister of Foreign Affairs Wunna Maung Lwin visits India for a meeting of the Joint Consultative Commission, including a meeting with PM Modi.

July 29, 2015: Sr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of Myanmar Defence Services, calls on PM Modi.

Aug. 21, 2015: India hosts the second Summit of Forum for India-Pacific Island Countries (FIPIC) in Jaipur India.

Aug. 31-Sep. 2, 2015: Australian Minister of Defence Kevin Andrews makes a four-day visit to India including to attend the second Australia-India Defense Ministers' Dialogue.

Sept. 5, 2015: Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) and Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha visits Thailand and Vietnam.

Sept. 17-18, 2015: Vice President Hamid Ansari visits Laos where he signs two MoUs.

Sept. 15-17, 2015: Vice President Ansari visits Cambodia and meets Prime Minister Hun Sen.

Oct. 2-7, 2015: Adm. RK Dhowan, chief of the Naval Staff makes an official visit to Australia to participate in the annual Sea Power Conference and "to consolidate existing Maritime Cooperation initiatives as well as explore new avenues."

Oct. 12, 2015: Vivian Balakrishnan, minister of foreign affairs of Singapore, visits India to co-chair the fourth India-Singapore Joint Ministerial Committee (JCM) Meeting.

Oct. 13-15, 2015: Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert F. DelRosario visits India for the third Joint Commission Meeting on Bilateral Relations.

Oct. 14, 2015: India's Cabinet approves an MoU between the India-Taipei Association (ITA) in Taipei and Taipei Economic and Cultural Center (TECC) in India for cooperation in the field of micro, small, and medium enterprises.

Oct. 14-19, 2015: *Malabar-15*, the 19th iteration of the US-India naval exercise, is held in the Bay of Bengal and for the second time includes Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Forces (JMSDF).

Nov. 1-4 2015: Vice President Ansari visits Indonesia where he delivers a speech entitled "Indonesia and India: Companion Souls, Strategic Partners."

Nov. 3-7, 2015: China's Vice President Li Yuanchao visits India; beginning his trip in Maharashtra and proceeding to West Bengal before holding official meetings in Delhi.

Nov. 21-23, 2015: PM Modi visits Malaysia for bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Najib Razak, and also to participate in the 10th East Asia Summit and the 13th ASEAN-India Summit.

Nov. 23-24, 2015: PM Modi makes an official visit to Singapore, the second since his attendance at the funeral of Lee Kwan Yew.

Dec. 11-13, 2015: Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo visits India.

