

SPECIAL ADDRESS

**by H.E. Dr. AKP Mochtan, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN
At the Inaugural Session, 2nd Round Table of the ASEAN-India
Network of Think-Tanks**

10 September 2013, Vientiane, Lao PDR

- *Your Excellency Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR;*
 - *Your Honourable Mr. Sri Salman Khurshid, Minister of External Affairs of India;*
 - *Your Excellency Mr. Sayakane Sisouvong, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR;*
 - *Dr. Biswajit Dhar, Director-General of the RIS, New Delhi;*
 - *Excellencies, distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen.*
1. At the outset, allow me, on behalf of Secretary-General of ASEAN His Excellency Le Luong Minh, to express my sincere appreciation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR, the Ministry of External Affairs of India, and the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi, for hosting and inviting me and the ASEAN Secretariat to participate in this important 2nd Round Table of the ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks to deliberate on ways and means to deepen the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership.
 2. ASEAN-India relations have grown from strength to strength. From a Sectoral Dialogue Partner in 1992, the relations was elevated to a full Dialogue Partner in 1995, and since 2002, we have been convening annual summits. Another milestone in the relationship was recorded last year, when the Leaders of ASEAN and India elevated the Dialogue Relations to a strategic partnership. The ASEAN-India Partnership has developed into one of ASEAN's most comprehensive,

dynamic and fast-growing partnerships spanning across a whole spectrum of political-security, economic, social-cultural and development collaboration.

3. The adoption of the Vision Statement at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit by the Leaders of ASEAN and India has given the impetus to advance further our Partnership to a new height and will serve as guidance to the pursuit of our strategic partnership for the years to come

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4. To us a “strategic partnership” refers to some key features that encompass, among others, a full dialogue partner of ASEAN, having acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), and having “substantive relations.”
5. In this context, I would like to recall a number of efforts taken by ASEAN and India in substantiating their dialogue relations commensurate with the elevated Partnership.
6. As part of commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations in 2012, a number of commemorative activities were carried out to signify the expanding and deepening of the Dialogue Partnership. These included the convening of ASEAN-India ministerial sectoral and high-level meetings in the fields of agriculture, energy, tourism, science & technology, and environment that deliberated on their respective joint cooperation programmes and collaboration, business-to-business and people-to-people contacts, and connectivity such as the 2nd ASEAN-India Car Rally and The Sail Training Ship “*Sudarshini*” Expedition to ASEAN Member States, which were aimed to spread public awareness of ASEAN-India relations and the land and maritime connectivity between the two regions.
7. Another distinct achievement was the establishment of the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to stock-take the ASEAN-India relations over the past 20 years and explore ways to widen and deepen existing cooperation towards a long-term strategic partnership between ASEAN

and India. The final Report of the EPG's recommendations was noted by the Leaders of ASEAN and India and provided valuable inputs to the future direction of the ASEAN-India Partnership.

8. I wish to also report that following the suggestion made by H.E. Le Luong Minh at the Delhi Dialogue V held in February 2013, the ASEAN Secretariat has undertaken a comprehensive mid-term review of the implementation of the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace and Shared Prosperity (2010-2015). This has been further discussed by the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN and Ambassador of India to ASEAN in Jakarta. The exercise is aimed to review the achievements made and map out the course of actions and possible joint activities from now until 2015, which would better correspond to the Vision set out by our Leaders, and study the important recommendations in the Report of the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group.
9. Another important development is the establishment of the ASEAN-India Centre in New Delhi to promote cooperation in various fields between ASEAN and India, including trade, investment, tourism, cultural exchange and education, among others.
10. In the economic field, ASEAN and India have set the aim of achieving a free trade area. With a combined market of over 1.8 billion people and a GDP of US\$ 3.8 trillion and relative geographical proximity, there is huge potential awaiting to be tapped. The total trade between ASEAN and India grew significantly by 43% in 2012 amounting to USD 74.9 billion, surpassing ASEAN-India trade target of USD 70 billion for 2012. At the 10th ASEAN-India Summit in November 2012, the Leaders set new target of achieving USD 100 billion in total trade to be achieved by 2015.
11. In services and investment, following the announcement of the conclusion of the negotiations on both Agreements on ASEAN-India Trade in Services and Investment made at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in December 2012, the legal scrubbing has been completed and the Agreement is targeted to be signed soon.
12. In other sphere of collaboration, ASEAN-India cooperation has been expanded to encompass human resource development, science and technology (S&T), people-to-people contacts, health and

pharmaceuticals, transport and infrastructure, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), tourism, information and communication technology (ICT), agriculture and energy.

13. I am also pleased to report that India's support for the Initiatives for ASEAN Integration (IAI) has been consistent and they have been carried out through the implementation of the number of initiatives and programmes such as setting up of the Centres for the English Language Training, the Setting-up of the Entrepreneurship Development Centres and implementation of ICT programmes. This has in turn contributed to the ASEAN pursuit of narrowing development gap.
14. ASEAN also welcomes India's commitment to support the ASEAN Community building, ASEAN's central role in the evolving regional architecture, and the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) and connectivity in the wider East Asia region.

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15. Twenty Years of ASEAN-India Partnership has yielded mutual benefits for both sides. The 20th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership in 2012 was a symbolic opportunity for us to look back and take forward this Partnership. As highlighted earlier, ASEAN-India Partnership has been wide-ranging and multi-faceted. Currently, there are 28 mechanisms within the framework of ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership to facilitate cooperation activities and strengthen the relations between the two sides, ranging from the Summit, ministerial, senior officials and expert working levels in all the three pillars of the ASEAN Community. The ASEAN-India Partnership looks set to be further strengthened and deepened for the years to come. Therefore, this would require multi-track and concerted efforts on both sides to effectively correspond to and nurture the elevated Partnership.
16. It is within this context that I am particularly delighted that the deliberation of today's Round Table as a Track 1.5 forum would focus on ways and means to deepen the elevated Partnership. Your contributions and inputs would be highly valued in the process of

strengthening ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership. On behalf of the Secretary-General of ASEAN, I wish your deliberation be crowned with a great success.

I thank you for your kind attention !

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