

India-East Asia Relations

The Weakest Link, but not Goodbye

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During the two years since India-East Asia relations were last considered here (see “India’s Latest Asian Incarnation,” *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Oct. 2000), India has achieved incremental progress in building political, economic, and even limited security ties to countries in East Asia. India, however, is still not an integral part of the region’s international relations or a critical bilateral relationship for Southeast Asia, China, or Japan. India’s relationship with East Asia thus remains the weakest link when compared to the region’s other major partners. But India’s growing engagement with East Asia in 2001-2002 both on a bilateral and multilateral basis demonstrates that India has neither bid the region, nor been bidden by it, goodbye!

India and Southeast Asia: A ‘Plus’ Up in Relations

India’s “Look East” policy in the early 1990s began with a focus on Southeast Asia, and so it remained during 2001-2002. Bilaterally, India exchanged high-level visits with nearly every member country of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and in certain cases more than once. It also made notable strides in its official relationship with ASEAN as an organization, culminating in the inaugural ASEAN-India summit or “ASEAN Plus One” formulation.

Enriching Bilateralism: Singapore continued to be the key to India’s closer relations with Southeast Asia. In early November 2000, during Indian President K.R. Narayanan’s visit to Singapore, the first by an Indian president in three decades, Singapore promised to propose that India become one of ASEAN’s four summit partners along with Japan, China, and South Korea. The lack of consensus within ASEAN toward the proposal was evident in Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong’s caveat that he would pursue the matter “without being aggressive.” India and Singapore also pursued a number of private sector and government initiatives designed to enhance their economic cooperation, particularly in the realms of information and telecommunications technology. In July 2001, Singapore and India held the second meeting of their recently established Information Communication Technology (ICT) Task Force. During Indian Prime

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Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's April 2002 Singapore visit, his second visit to the city-state in less than a year, India and Singapore announced the establishment of a joint study group (JSG) to explore an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) that would cover trade as well as intellectual property, customs cooperation, and the financial sector. The efforts on the economic front speak both to mutual interest, and simultaneously the lack of satisfaction in the progress made thus far. Singaporean officials repeatedly encouraged India to "achieve its full economic potential" (diplomatese for more economic reform). However, significantly, reflecting India's very active diplomacy in the region, Singapore did not repeat past admonishments to India to pay as much attention to Southeast Asia as it does to the United States and Europe.

Vietnam also continued as a focus of Indian bilateral diplomacy in Southeast Asia. In November 2000, eight months after the first-ever Indian defense minister's visit to Hanoi, Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh followed with a visit of his own. In addition to chairing the Indian team in the 10th India-Vietnam Joint Commission meeting, the primary purpose of this visit was coordination for the Nov. 10 inaugural meeting of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) grouping held in Laos. The grouping brings together India, Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos and is aimed at cooperation on tourism, transportation, as well as cultural and information exchanges.

Singh's visit also paved the way for the January 2001 visit of India's Prime Minister Vajpayee to Hanoi, the first by an Indian prime minister in seven years. During this visit, India and Vietnam, rather than focus on defense cooperation as they had in March 2000, focused on political and economic relations. Prime Minister Vajpayee and Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Van Khai signed agreements to extend cultural exchanges until 2003 and cooperate on tourism as well as for India to provide equipment for a nuclear energy laboratory. India also granted \$2 million to establish a Software and Training Center in Vietnam, following up an earlier credit of \$5 million to set up two centers for software and human resource development. India and Vietnam also agreed to increase their bilateral trade from a paltry \$155 million in 1999-2000 to \$500 million in three years. On the investment front, India, which has about \$200 million in direct investment in Vietnam, increased the amount significantly with the signing of a \$238 million gas deal under which a foreign consortium led by India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Videsh Ltd. will extract natural gas from Vietnam's Nam Con Son Basin. On the political front, Vietnam gave its support for Indian membership in Southeast Asian economic and political forums and reiterated past support for New Delhi's entry into the United Nations Security Council. Defense issues were not entirely ignored. Both countries pledged to continue their cooperation though Vietnam reportedly decided not to purchase Indian naval craft due to their high prices.

India-Burma relations also received a fillip, building on a rapprochement initiated in the first half of 2000. Though India had sharply criticized Burma's suppression of democracy after 1990, developments in relations during the past two years make clear that anti-insurgency, drug trafficking, and regional geopolitical considerations (i.e., countering

Chinese influence) have taken higher priority than democracy in India's approach to Burma. For its part, Burma seems committed to diversifying its relationships beyond China.

Perhaps the most important bilateral event in relations was the November 2000 visit to New Delhi by Gen. Maung Aye, vice chairman of Burma's State Peace and Development Council, who received a "red carpet" welcome from India's entire senior political leadership. During talks characterized as "highly positive," India acknowledged Burma's assistance in destroying the camps of Naga insurgents within its borders despite suffering casualties. The two countries agreed to further increase cooperation against insurgency and drug trafficking and to boost bilateral trade. Burma's Foreign Minister Win Aung meanwhile sought to allay India's anxiety about Chinese military activity in the Coco islands saying, "I want to tell the Indian public that any island in my country, or Burma's soil, will not be used as a military base by any power against India."

Gen. Maung Aye's visit to India was reciprocated by that of India's External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh in February 2001. He became the first senior Indian official to visit Burma since Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited in 1987 and since the crackdown on democracy in the country in 1990. Burma's Construction Minister Saw Tun and Singh opened the 160-kilometer Indo-Myanmar Friendship Road linking the northeastern India border town of Moreh in Manipur state with Kalewa on the Chindwin River in Burma. Singh also inaugurated the "Myanmar-India Friendship Center for Remote Sensing and Data Processing," which was developed with Indian technical expertise to help Burma generate weather forecasts as well as crop and ground water surveys. Burma and India also agreed to open four border checkpoints to increase trade and the ruling junta. Rangoon said it would consider re-opening the Indian Consulate in Mandalay.

The year 2000 also saw a further consolidation of India-Indonesia relations in the post-Suharto era. Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid's first foreign trip was to India in February 2000. In January 2001 Prime Minister Vajpayee traveled to Jakarta where he signed five agreements on defense cooperation, the establishment of a Joint Commission, science and technology, cultural exchanges, and agricultural cooperation. The agreement on "Cooperative Activities in the Field of Defense" is especially noteworthy as no such agreement existed between the two countries in the past. Under its terms, the countries will coordinate defense activities in various fields including training, technical assistance, and supply of defense equipment and materials. Both countries will also share their experiences in the field of defense management and policy. The implementation of the agreement remains to be seen. The decision to establish a Joint Commission at the foreign-minister level suggests a decision to regularize bilateral relations at a fairly high level. India also took the opportunity of the visit to Indonesia to reiterate its desire for closer relations with ASEAN as a whole. Prime Minister Vajpayee, in a speech to the Indian community in Jakarta said, "we want an India-ASEAN summit on the lines of the India-EU summit held in Lisbon last year."

Wahid's successor, Indonesian President Megawarti Sukarnoputri, followed up Vajpayee's visit by going to India in April 2002, the last stop in a tour of Asian countries. The two countries signed Memoranda of Understanding on cooperation in peaceful uses of outer space, visa exemption for diplomatic and official passport holders, and a vocational center for the construction sector. India and Indonesia also signed an agreement for New Delhi to build a railway line and a port terminal in South Sumatra in exchange for coal, timber, and crude oil. Several private sector business agreements were also signed on projects ranging from vegetable oil to computers.

India-Malaysia relations, never particularly warm, received attention in 2001-2002. In May 2001 Prime Minister Vajpayee visited Kuala Lumpur (following an earlier cancellation due to the devastating Gujarat earthquake), the first Indian leader to do so in six years. The visit was an especially important one given press reports that Malaysia opposed the proposal to have a separate India-ASEAN summit. Nevertheless, Vajpayee, in an address to the Institute of Diplomatic and Foreign Relations, made a case for a closer India-ASEAN dialogue. He also reiterated India's position on nuclear proliferation, saying pointedly that "[w]e have proved that India is neither a proliferation threat nor an exporter of sensitive nuclear or missile technology. This cannot be said to be true of all parties to the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty." Many observers viewed the last sentence as a reference to China, and specifically a reference to alleged China-Pakistan nuclear dealings. Malaysia was also noticeably cool in its view of India on the eve of the visit, with Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad saying, "[we] should not look at [India] as if they are our enemy. We should think of them according to their policy and if they are friendly we should also be friendly." Other irritants included a large trade imbalance between the two countries and difficult negotiations on an extradition treaty. To help address the trade problem, India offered Malaysia \$50 million worth of credit to help boost trade. India also has promised to help resolve problems in contracts for road projects in the country awarded directly to Malaysia.

Notwithstanding these issues, the visit itself was successful on a number of fronts. Seven agreements between the two governments and a number of business-to-business deals were concluded. One agreement, for example, opens the way for Malaysia to use Indian facilities to launch its own satellites. Agreement was also reached to allow an Indian company to construct a new \$1.5 billion rail link in northern Malaysia. India and Malaysia were not able to overcome, however, what Vajpayee described as "legal hurdles" in the way of concluding a bilateral extradition treaty.

India also pursued cooperative activities with Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos, both on a bilateral basis, as well as in connection with multilateral activities such as the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) program and India-Thailand-Burma trilateral cooperation on transportation infrastructure. For example, in June 2001, India's Vice President Krishan Kant traveled to Cambodia for an official visit which was reciprocated by Cambodia's Senior Minister and Foreign Minister Hor Namhong in March 2002. In April 2002, Prime Minister Vajpayee made a state visit to Cambodia. India offered to send a judge to serve on a tribunal for the possible trial of Khmer Rouge leaders if the United Nations decided not to take part in the tribunal. India and Cambodia also signed agreements on direct

flights between the two countries, renovation of Ta Prohm Temple in Angkor Wat, and visa exemptions for diplomatic and official passport holders.

In November 2002, Vajpayee visited Laos, which will be ASEAN's "country coordinator" for India beginning in June 2003. India announced plans to establish an information technology center in Laos. Agreements were also signed on drug trafficking, defense, visa exemptions for official passport holders, and a \$10 million credit line for Laotian infrastructure development. In April 2002, India's External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh visited Thailand to discuss terrorism and economic cooperation with Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai. The two foreign ministers then traveled together to Burma to discuss a proposal for building a highway linking the three countries. Prime Minister Vajpayee also held discussions and a working lunch with Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in Bangkok on his return from the inaugural ASEAN-India summit and state visit to Laos in November 2002.

Aspiring to Multilateralism: In addition to active bilateral relations with Southeast Asian countries in 2001-2002, India also achieved a new level in its relationship with ASEAN, the region's preeminent multilateral grouping. The high point was the first ASEAN-India summit in November 2002. However, India is not included in the ASEAN Plus Three grouping that includes China, Japan, and South Korea as ASEAN's partners. Instead India is tacked on to ASEAN in a "Plus One" relationship. This formulation, too, speaks to the "weakest link" characterization of India's role relative to ASEAN's other Asian partners. For example, India's total trade with ASEAN stands at only \$10 billion. This compares highly unfavorably with the United States' \$120 billion, Japan's \$116 billion, China's \$70 billion, and even South Korea's \$32 billion. Investments between India and ASEAN are even smaller. An important reason India's economic ties with Southeast Asia are in their infancy is because India's trade liberalization started only a decade ago and is far from complete. A positive note is that trade has been growing steadily – 30 percent during the past three years. And India's November 2002 offer to Southeast Asia of a Regional Trade and Investment Arrangement (RTIA), mimicking free trade proposals by China and Japan, if actually implemented, could increase India-Southeast Asia trade and investment ties in the future.

India and ASEAN have also launched a number of initiatives to establish niche areas of cooperation in human resource development, transport and infrastructure, science, as well as information and space technology that could help expand trade and investment ties. A new ASEAN-India Task Force on Economic Linkages to enhance economic ties was established at the first ASEAN-India summit. Another avenue of greater India-ASEAN cooperation could be India's increased support for the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) under which India would offer preferential tariff treatment and human resources development support for the new, least developed members of ASEAN. Notwithstanding all these declared commitments, it remains to be seen how much, not to mention how fast, India-Southeast Asia economic ties will increase. The record up to now has not been encouraging, though bullish assessments exist.

Whatever the long-term might bring, at least during 2001-2002 India fulfilled some of the ambitions of its “Look East” policy in its relations with Southeast Asia, though there is a consciousness that more can be done. India moved well beyond the fallout from the nuclear tests in 1998. It kept to a manageable level pressure regarding India-Pakistan relations and the Kashmir dispute, including the prevention of Pakistan’s inclusion in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). New Delhi improved its relationship to ASEAN, thus avoiding further marginalization in the post-Cold War international environment. It improved, albeit at a low level, trade and other economic ties with the region. India succeeded in reducing suspicions about its intentions in the region through confidence-building efforts and high-level political and security discussions. For its part, Southeast Asia has leveraged its influence through the inclusion of another large country in its institution-building efforts. Individual Southeast Asian countries have enhanced bilateral ties with India on matters ranging from software technology to trade to defense cooperation. The India-Southeast Asia relationship is not so much a reincarnation as a recalibration generally in a positive direction from the perspective of both sides.

India and China: Muddling Along

If India’s relations with Southeast Asia were generally dynamic, the same cannot be said of India-China relations. Though China-India relations have moved well beyond India’s 1998 nuclear tests and the reference to China as a potential threat, they remain mired in history and suspicion. Perhaps the only area of China-India relations that witnessed good progress is trade, though even here there are irritations.

Border Brouhaha: The period under review began with brouhaha over the China-India border. In October 2000, the chief minister of a northeast Indian state alleged that Chinese forces inadvertently might be crossing the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between the two countries. In the event, the allegations led to strong denials by Chinese officials, and visits to the border area by India’s Defense Minister George Fernandes and Army Chief Gen. Padmanabhan. Fernandes confirmed that the “border with China is well protected and well guarded and there is no need for any concern. We need to improve infrastructure and roads along the border with China.” Despite this little drama, in mid-November, India and China held the eighth session of their Experts Group regarding the border. At this meeting the two countries agreed to accelerate the pace of talks on the clarification of the LAC and exchanged maps on the middle sector of the disputed border. Still, India’s defense secretary announced, the day after these talks were concluded, additional monies for the Border Road Organization (BRO) to expand the road networks along strategic areas facing China and Pakistan. Late in 2000, additional reports of China’s alleged trespasses on the border were made in the Indian media and denied by Chinese officials. Uncertainties over the border were compounded by official Indian allegations that a separatist group leader in the northeast had admitted to receiving Chinese arms.

The India-China Joint Working Group (JWG) held its 13th meeting on July 31, 2001 and continued the snail-like progress on border discussions. The JWG reviewed the work being done in the Experts Group on the clarification and confirmation of the LAC, and on the implementation of confidence-building measures (CBMs). On Nov. 21, 2002, India and China conducted the 14th joint working group meeting on their border dispute. From all indications, and notwithstanding the stated commitment to accelerate clarification of the disputed border and to exchange maps on the middle sector, progress on settling the border dispute is likely to inch along rather than accelerate ahead.

I'm not a Threat, You're not a Threat: An important event was the January 2001 visit of the chairman of China's National People's Congress, Li Peng, to India. He became the highest-ranking Chinese official to visit India since President Jiang Zemin in 1996 and since India conducted its nuclear tests in 1998 citing the potential threat from China as one of the rationales. Li told Indian parliamentarians that "China and India do not pose any threat to each other as they share similar views on a multi-polar world in which both can play their roles for world peace and development." The only major agreement to come out of the visit, however, was one to form India-China Parliamentary Friendship Groups in their respective parliaments. Indeed, India carried out a test of the Agni II missile a day after Li Peng's departure from India.

In February 2001, India granted refugee status to the 17th Karmapa Lama, a youth who is one of the holiest figures in Tibetan Buddhism, more than a year after he fled from his homeland. China in turn warned India not to let the Karmapa Lama engage in political activities. The same month also saw India and China hold a second round of talks on regional security as part of an effort to maintain an institutionalized and regular dialogue. In January 2002 China's Premier Zhu Rongji visited India. India and China agreed to establish a bilateral dialogue mechanism against terrorism, to accelerate the process of clarification and confirmation of the Line of Actual Control, and dedicate the seventh meeting of the ministerial level Joint Economic Group to strengthening trade and economic cooperation. Six MOUs and agreements were signed relating to science and technology, cooperation in outer space, tourism, phytosanitary measures, and supply of hydrological data by China to India regarding the Brahmaputra River during the flood season. Two months later, India and China launched the first direct commercial airline route between the two countries. And in the spring of 2002 India's External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh traveled to China (on the return trip of the inaugural flight) and the two countries agreed to activate a joint working group on economic and trade relations and a first-ever counterterrorism dialogue.

Chasing Rupees, Chasing Reminbi: Sino-Indian economic relations have been on the upswing, and attention, both positive and negative, was given to this facet of relations. Bilateral trade, which officially restarted between the two countries in 1978, has grown rapidly from \$265 million in 1991 to \$3.6 billion in 2001. In 2001 bilateral trade increased 23.4 percent over 2000. The growth in the volume of trade has occasioned considerable complaints within India about alleged Chinese dumping of goods, and there have been other minor frictions over trade matters. Complaints about purported Chinese

dumping have come largely from India's industry and domestic trade organizations such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) rather than official Indian sources. Indeed, the government of India has been at pains to point out that Indian exports to China are outpacing imports from China. For example, in 2001, Indian imports from China increased by 21.5 percent, while Indian exports to China increased by 25.6 percent. A bilateral India-China trade agreement signed in 2000 as part of China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) is expected to address irritations in trade matters. By early 2001 Indian complaints about Chinese dumping led Beijing's ambassador to New Delhi to proclaim that "Chinese enterprises and Chinese products have met with unfair treatment in India. All this has to some degree impeded further development of Sino-Indian economic trade and economic cooperation."

The Two Towers – Pakistan and Nonproliferation: China's close relationship with Pakistan remained unchanged during the period under review, and India continues to regard China-Pakistan relations as a major security problem. During acute India-Pakistan tensions from December 2001 to June 2002, China played a subdued role in pressing for restraint on both sides. But Chinese press reports also indicated that China perceived Pakistan as receiving an excessive share of the blame for deteriorating India-Pakistan relations. India also reacted coolly to a November 2000 pledge by China to enforce strict export controls against missile proliferation. Meanwhile, there were few public denunciations by China of India's nuclear weapons development, and no publicity was given to China's earlier demands that India abide by the post-1998 nuclear tests United Nations resolution on nonproliferation in India and Pakistan.

India and Japan: Sanctions 'Discontinued,' Relations Persist

India-Japan relations moved toward normalcy after India's nuclear tests with the visit of Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro to India in August 2000. Since then, relations have been stilted though somewhat more active. The most dramatic change during the period under review was the Oct. 26, 2001 decision by the government of Japan to "discontinue measures on India and Pakistan taken in May 1998." The decision was one aspect of Japan's responses to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. India thus became eligible to receive grant aid and yen loans for new projects as well as Japanese support for loans from international development banks. India's response to the announcement was cool. It "took note" of it. There was also resentment at the insinuation that the measures had been effective in promoting India's nuclear restraint and considerable peevishness that Tokyo might "revive" sanctions if the nonproliferation threat from India (and Pakistan) increases. Despite the discontinuance of sanctions, India and Japan remained far apart on issues of nuclear nonproliferation. It is near-certain that absent the tragedy of September, Japan's measures restricting economic cooperation, like U.S. sanctions on India and Pakistan, still would be in place.

General political dialogue between India and Japan has been more robust. In July 2001, the first India-Japan Comprehensive Security Dialogue was held in Tokyo to discuss respective security and defense policies, the regional security environment, and disarmament and nonproliferation. A decision was taken to institutionalize the dialogue

on an annual basis. Another important event was the visit of former Prime Minister Mori to India in October 2001 as a special envoy of Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro. In November, the eighth round of Foreign Ministry consultations was held. The focus of discussions at these consultations was Prime Minister Vajpayee's scheduled visit to Japan, including marking the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations, and the situation in Afghanistan. Though the planned February 2001 visit was postponed due to the Gujarat earthquake, he traveled to Japan in December 2001. He became only the second Indian head of government to visit Japan in a decade. It is noteworthy that his first stop was Osaka, not Tokyo, signaling the economic rather than political focus of the trip. In a speech to a Japanese business group, the prime minister described India as a "congenial atmosphere" for foreign investment. The major political announcement of the trip was the decision to hold a dialogue on counterterrorism in the framework of the existing Comprehensive Security Dialogue.

There were other activities related specifically to pushing forward economic cooperation between the two countries. For example, the Information Technology Summit agreed to during Prime Minister Mori's visit was held in September 2001 during the visit of India's Minister for Information Technology Pramod Mahajan to Tokyo. The Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) sent two missions to India to explore ways of promoting bilateral investment and economic cooperation in December 2000 and January 2001. And Aiko Jiro, chairman of the Standing Committee of the Japan-India Business Cooperation Committee, led a business delegation to India in July 2001 to participate in the 23rd meeting of the committee. However, trade and investment relations between Japan and India remain extremely limited.

There were also a number of Japan-India defense-related exchanges. Japan participated in the International Fleet Review held in February 2001 at Mumbai and a Japanese training squadron of the Maritime Self-Defense Forces visited Chennai in May 2001. India's Navy participated in the Japanese International Fleet Review in Tokyo in October 2002. There has also been continued cooperation between the two coast guards on combating piracy. In May 2001 India's director general of the Coast Guard visited Japan during joint exercises. In August 2001, India's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen. S. Padmanabhan became the first COAS to visit Japan.

Looking Ahead

India is the "weakest link" among East Asia's major partners. But India today has more extensive and better relations with the region than perhaps it has ever had. There is little chance that India, or the region, will bid goodbye to each other. India places a priority on ties with Southeast Asia where in 2001-2002 it pursued an active bilateral and regional diplomacy. Many of its goals in the region were achieved though India seems conscious that it has much to do before it is regarded as an integral and important player in the region. Meanwhile, India has continued to rebuild ties with East Asia's two big powers China and Japan since the 1998 nuclear tests. However, for different reasons, these ties have been difficult. Despite two very troubled years in India's domestic politics, India-

Pakistan relations, and the adjacent neighborhood as well as in the international environment after the Sept. 11 attacks, India maintained a relatively active diplomatic effort in East Asia.

Chronology of India-East Asia Relations October-December 2000

Oct. 13, 2000: Chief minister of the Indian state Arunachal Pradesh, Mukut Mithi, suggests that Chinese forces inadvertently may be crossing the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between the two countries.

Oct. 13, 2000: Indian Union Minister for Labour Dr. Satyanarayan Jatya states that India and China will work toward a joint strategy to oppose any link between labor standards and trade issues in the World Trade Organization.

Oct. 16, 2000: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhu Bangzao rejects Indian allegations about Chinese incursions across the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Oct. 24, 2001: Singapore Telecommunications and India's Bharati Enterprises announce plans to build India's first fiber-optic undersea cable linking Singapore to the Indian coastal cities of Mumbai and Chennai.

Oct. 29, 2000: After completing his one-day visit of border posts, Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes says that "[o]ur border with China is well protected and well guarded and there is no need for any concern. We need to improve infrastructure and roads along the border with China."

Nov. 6-10, 2000: India's External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh visits Vietnam and Laos. Vietnam offers support to India's candidacy for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and bid for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation membership.

Nov. 9-13, 2000: Indian President K.R. Narayanan is the first Indian president in 30 years to visit Singapore. Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong says that Singapore would propose, "without being aggressive," that India become one of ASEAN's four summit partners along with Japan, China, and South Korea.

Nov. 10, 2000: Inaugural meeting of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) grouping takes place in Laos and issues the "Vientiane Declaration" regarding tourism, transportation, cultural, and information exchanges among India, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

Nov. 13, 2000: India and the PRC hold the eighth round of Expert Group (EG) talks on their border dispute and agree to accelerate the talks on the clarification of their disputed border, the LAC. Both sides exchange maps of the middle sector of the disputed border.

Nov. 14-21, 2000: Burma's Gen. Maung Aye, vice chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, receives a "red carpet" welcome during a visit to India.

Nov. 22, 2000: India cautiously welcomes a pledge by China to enforce strict export controls against missile proliferation.

Nov. 30, 2000: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue says that "China's development does not constitute any threat to any country including India. We are confident that India's development, similarly, does not constitute a threat to China."

Dec. 25, 2000: India's Navy announces plans to set up a Far Eastern Naval Command based in the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

January 2001-December 2001

Jan. 8-9, 2001: Indian Prime Minister (PM) Atal Behari Vajpayee becomes the first Indian leader to visit Vietnam since 1994.

Jan. 9-17, 2001: Former Premier and Chairman of the National People's Congress Li Peng is the highest ranking Chinese official to visit India since President Jiang Zemin in 1996 and New Delhi's nuclear tests in May 1998. The two sides agreed to form India-China Parliamentary Friendship Groups in their Parliaments.

Jan. 11-13, 2001: PM Vajpayee visits Indonesia where he signs five notable agreements on defense cooperation, the establishment of a Joint Commission, science and technology, cultural exchange, and agricultural cooperation.

Jan. 18, 2002: India tests the Agni II missile a day after the departure from India of Li Peng.

Feb. 2001: PM Vajpayee's scheduled visits to Malaysia and Japan are postponed due to the Gujarat earthquake on Jan. 26, 2001.

Feb. 4, 2001: India grants refugee status to the 17th Karmapa Lama, a youth who is one of the holiest figures in Tibetan Buddhism, more than a year after he fled from his homeland. China warns India not to let the Karmapa Lama engage in political activities.

Feb. 7, 2001: India and China hold a second round of talks on regional security as part of an effort to maintain an institutionalized and regular dialogue.

Feb. 13-16, 2001: India's External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh visits Burma, the first senior Indian official to do so since PM Rajiv Gandhi visited in 1987 and since the crackdown on democracy in Burma in 1990.

Feb. 16, 2001: India, as host of the International Fleet Review, a four-day maritime exercise, calls for a joint action by Asian naval powers to combat growing piracy, drug trafficking, and gun-running in the region's troubled sea lanes.

March 29, 2001: Japan announces that it will extend official development assistance for two ongoing Indian infrastructure projects. However, measures prohibiting loans for new projects in response to India's 1998 nuclear tests will remain in place.

April 16, 2001: One of India's largest listed software firms, Satyam Computer Services, which has an estimated market capitalization of \$4 billion (\$7.26 billion), officially opens its Asia-Pacific headquarters in Singapore.

May 14-17, 2001: PM Vajpayee is the first Indian leader to visit Malaysia in six years.

May 17, 2001: Indian and Japanese coast guard ships conduct joint anti-piracy exercises.

May 17, 2001: India and Burma begin a joint military offensive on the bases of three rebel groups in India's northeast.

May 22, 2001: The BBC reports that at least 50 Burmaese soldiers are killed in heavy fighting with separatist Indian rebels inside Burma.

June 20, 2002: India's Ambassador to Japan rejects Japan Defense Agency chief's request to India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

July 24, 2001: India and Japan hold security and defense discussions as part of their efforts to establish a regular dialogue. Subjects of discussion included participation in each other's military exercises, studies in the areas of defense and security, and disaster relief, and search and rescue operations.

July 25, 2001: The Eighth Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is held in Hanoi, Vietnam. India, represented by former Minister of Defense K.C. Pant, proposes that trade ministers from India and Southeast Asia should hold an annual meeting to boost economic cooperation.

Aug. 27-30, 2001: Army Chief Gen. Padmanabhan becomes the first Indian army chief to visit Japan.

Aug. 28, 2001: India announces plans to establish a strategic command in its Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Oct. 2001: PM Vajpayee visits Singapore.

Oct. 9, 2001: External Affairs Minister Singh telephones Chinese foreign minister to discuss cooperation following Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

Oct. 26, 2001: Japan announces that it will “discontinue the measures on India and Pakistan taken in May 1998” in response to their countries nuclear tests. India is now eligible for grant aid and yen loans for new projects as well as Japanese support for loans by multinational development banks.

Nov. 5-6, 2001: At the Seventh ASEAN Summit held in Brunei Darussalaam, ASEAN decides to upgrade its relations with India to the summit level.

Nov. 21-22, 2001: India-Japan 21st Century Eminent Persons’ Group meets for the second time to draw up a proposed list of cooperative activities for the two governments to consider. Among the proposed activities are regular talks on the safety of regional sea lanes and joint infrastructure development.

Dec. 7-11, 2001: PM Vajpayee becomes the second Indian leader to visit Japan in a decade. His first stop is Osaka, where he asserts that India offers a “congenial atmosphere” for foreign investment. India and Japan agree to hold a dialogue on counterterrorism in the framework of their Comprehensive Security Dialogue.

January 2002-December 2002

Jan. 13-18, 2002: China’s Premier Zhu Rongji visits India. Zhu’s visit follows a 10-year gap since the last Chinese premier’s visit. India and China agree to establish a bilateral dialogue mechanism against terrorism, to accelerate the process of clarification and confirmation of the Line of Actual Control, and dedicate the seventh meeting of the ministerial level Joint Economic Group to strengthening trade and economic cooperation. Six MOUs and agreements are signed relating to science and technology, cooperation in outer space, tourism, phytosanitary measures, and supply of hydrological data by China to India regarding the Brahmaputra river during the flood season.

Jan. 24-26, 2002: The 4th ASEAN-India Joint Consultative Committee meeting is held.

Feb. 2002: PM Thaksin Shinawatra of Thailand visits India.

March 4, 2002: The Singapore and Indian navies begin their annual anti-submarine warfare exercise – the ninth in a series of exercises between the two navies since 1993.

March 28, 2002: India and China launch the first direct commercial airline route between the two countries.

March 29-April 2, 2002: External Affairs Minister Singh visits China. Agreement is reached to activate a joint working group on economic and trade relations and establish a first-ever counterterrorism dialogue.

April 2-4, 2002: External Affairs Minister Singh visits South Korea.

April 1-5, 2002: Indonesian President Megawarti Sukarnoputri visits India. Memoranda of Understanding on cooperation in peaceful uses of outer space, visa exemption for diplomatic and official passport holders, and a vocational center for the construction sector are signed. India and Indonesia also sign an agreement for New Delhi to build a railway line and a port terminal in South Sumatra in exchange for coal, timber, and crude oil. Several private sector business agreements are also signed on projects ranging from vegetable oil to computers.

April 5, 2002: India, Burma, and Thailand hold their first trilateral talks on trade, tourism, and a proposal for building of a highway linking the three countries.

April 7, 2002: The first ever private undersea cable between India and Singapore is commissioned.

April 7-9, 2002: PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee visits Singapore. India and Singapore sign two Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) for cooperation in the telecommunications and culture sectors and agree to establish a Joint Study Group (JSG) to explore an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) that would cover trade as well as intellectual property, customs cooperation, and the financial sector.

April 9-11, 2002: PM Vajpayee visits Cambodia. India offers to send a judge to serve on a tribunal for the possible trial of Khmer Rouge leaders if the United Nations decided not to take part in the tribunal. India also reaffirmed its commitment to the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation program – an infrastructure development project between Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, and India established in 2000. India and Cambodia also sign agreements on direct flights between the two countries, renovation of Ta Prohm temple in Angkor Wat, and visa exemptions for diplomatic and official passport holders.

April 26, 2002: At a ceremony to release respective commemorative stamps of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations, Japan's ambassador to India says, "Both India and Japan are more than well qualified for a seat in the enlarged [United Nations] Security Council."

July 8, 2002: Defense Minister George Fernandes visits Japan for meetings with FM Kawaguchi Yoriko.

July 31, 2002: India's FM Sinha and Japan's FM Kawaguchi meet on the sidelines of ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference meetings in Brunei.

Sept. 12, 2002: PM Vajpayee and Japan's PM Koizumi Junichiro meet on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly annual meeting in New York.

Nov. 4-5, 2002: The inaugural ASEAN-India summit is held in Cambodia.

Nov. 6-8, 2002: PM Vajpayee visits Laos, which is set to become ASEAN's "country coordinator" for India beginning in June 2003. India announces plans to establish an information technology center in Laos. Agreements are signed on drug trafficking, defense, visa exemptions for official passport holders, and a \$10 million credit line for Laotian infrastructure development.

Nov. 21, 2002: India and China conduct the 14th joint working group meeting on their border dispute.

