

CHAPTER-X

Relations Between India and Malaysia: Vajpayee Era

Foreign Policy of Vajpayee Government:

On 19 March 1998 Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee assumed the office of the Prime Minister of India as fourth non-Congress Government at the Centre. The BJP led coalition government which came into power in 1998, while adhering to the basic principles of India's foreign policy, gave a new orientation to the foreign policy which is more realistic than moralistic. With regard to neighbouring countries it favoured more intimate relations but did not approve of unilateral concessions, as done by Gujral Government. It insists on reciprocity. Under the new policy greater emphasis is being laid on security of the country. On this plea India conducted explosions at Pokharan in May 1998. In short, of late India has emerged as a self-centred country which is trying to pursue national interests single mindedly, rather than following abstract universal goals. It is evident from the preceding account that India's foreign policy has been based on stable principles and its directions have remained firmly steady. Further, it has stood the test of the time and helped India to play a dynamic role in the international affairs.¹

Relations Between the two Countries:

The Government of Mr. Vajpayee carried out underground nuclear test on 11 May 1998. The act was seemingly done to prevent Pakistan from exploiting Kashmir, However, it backfired when the developed countries took no time in condemning the act of India. The situation was further aggravated when even the close India's ally like Malaysia openly condemned the act on 12 May 1998. The act was considered by the Government of Malaysia as clear demonstration of betrayal by the Government of India particularly when Malaysia was putting her efforts in curbing nuclear proliferation in the region. It was considered by Malaysia as a serious blow to her efforts. Malaysia felt

disappointed that India has taken such a step contrary to the wishes of its South East Asian neighbours.²

However, with the nuclear test conducted by Pakistan on 28 May 1998, soon precipitated the matter as both the countries argued that the Nuclear weapons could better serve as war deterrent and could ensure a more potential security in the regions.

In the recent years the foreign policies of India seemed to upheaved by the setback to New Delhi on the issue of extradition of Mr. Ottavio Quattrocchi , the prime accused in the Bofors scandal. It was a major blow to the foreign policies of Indian Government. The visit of Mr. Vajpayee in 2001 was especially intended to resolve the issue of extradition but it yielded nothing due to many unresolved technical problem. Further the Central BJP Government also failed in curbing the growing influence of Pakistan as the later continued to exploit the Islamic candidature of Malaysia. At home the internal communal disturbances are also seen as major hurdle in exercising fruitful influence on Malaysia as it used to be in the past.³

The matter was further taken up by Mr. Vajpayee on his visit to Malaysia on 13 May 2001 when he tried to win Malaysia on his part by advancing out India's critical security problems and threat from external aggression.

Face to face with Mahathir Mohammad and his delegation, the Indian Prime Minister had to deliberate and state India's position on Jammu and Kashmir, frankly and in a candid manner. It is an issue on which the country cannot afford friends to have any doubts. Malaysia now understands that there is no change in Indian position. That the state of Jammu and Kashmir is central to the country's integrity and communal harmony. And that India seeks a peaceful solution to the problem but the ongoing cross-border terrorism must end before any talks can be resumed. Having been left in no doubt Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad clearly endorsed the Indian position when he stated that Malaysia was for peaceful solution to the problem.⁴

Mr. Vajpayee made it clear to Malaysia that the security of India and that of ASEAN are closely interlinked. He believed that a multi-polar world order would provide

the best guarantee of equal security for all states. Mr. Vajpayee stated that India respect the status of South East Asia as a nuclear Weapons Free Zone and, as a nuclear weapon state, and made India's position clear by asserting that India is willing to convert this recognition into a de jure commitment.⁵

Mr. Vajpayee seriously complained that while India has been campaigning for nuclear disarmament, much of the world went along with a discriminator NPT, which preserved the right to nuclear weaponization of a few countries, even while keeping the rest in a permanently disarmed condition. The nuclear weapon states showed no intention of implementing Article VI of the treaty, which committed them to nuclear disarmament in a phased manner.⁶

He impressed upon the Malaysian's counterpart that Non-nuclear states effectively connived with them by subscribing, in 1995, to an indefinite extension of this hopelessly flawed treaty. India had then to draw its own conclusions. Three years ago, India decided to conduct nuclear tests, based on an objectives evaluation of our security environment, and to create for India the necessary strategic autonomy and space. In doing so, India did not violate any treaty, agreement or understanding to which India was a party.⁷

He justified that there is a better understanding in the world today of India's decision to maintain a minimum credible nuclear deterrent. He declared a unilateral moratorium on underground explosive tests. He declared policy of no first use, and a commitment never to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states. He argued 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 NPT. India's approach is further underpinned by the abiding commitment to the goal of a nuclear weapon-free world.

India on the occasion, showed her willingness by expressing the fact that India is surely conscious of the striving for a new security structure in the world, moving away from obsolete Cold War constructs. India is indeed engaged in a process of dialogue and consultation with friends and partners to help shape a new security environment free of

confrontation and tension. The security dialogue with ASEAN can also include this theme.⁸

Thus there was no doubts remaining that Malaysia could not hear the much needed justification of India's stand and indeed as the growth in economic sectors revealed that Malaysia paid a maximum attention to India's position on Nuclear and Kashmir issues and gave a clean cheat the long standing friend.

The nature of the Global village has made it necessary to tackle even non-military issues of security in a comprehensive manner. Since this region lies alongside sea lanes of great strategic importance, which need to be protected poverty and shortages of food and energy threaten the stability of societies. Population growth and the spread of diseases like AIDS and TB are factors of deep concern. Environmental degradation and cyber crime are relatively newer concerns.

There can be no effective solution to these problems within national boundaries. They have to be tackled through a cooperative approach, holistically and regionally. The security dialogue between India and ASEAN is therefore of utmost importance.

Threats like religious extremism, drug trafficking, money laundering, and terrorism have cast a dark shadow over the region. India has been a victim of State-sponsored and cross border terrorism seeking to redraw national boundaries. Such violence in the name of holy war is a grave menace especially to pluralistic societies, and endangers a peaceful and civilized global order.⁹

India and ASEAN are on the same side of the socio-economic divide in the debate on globalization. Opening up the national economies to global markets cannot become a mantra at the cost of equitable development and social justice. The passion for rapid globalization should be tempered by compassion for its unintended victims.

The financial and economic crisis in this region in 1997 vividly demonstrated how volatile capital flows could threaten the very existence of even vibrant economies. The recovery process of various countries has also shown that external prescriptions for

economic measures or the pace of reform do not necessarily guarantee economic recovery or political stability.¹⁰

It is urgently needed to draw appropriate lessons from these experiences so that developing economies do not remain vulnerable to destabilization or stagnation from a headlong rush into globalization.

India has long maintained that some of the most vital issues of development and poverty alleviation are in danger of getting marginalized in our hurry to introduce new regimes in trade, investment and intellectual property. India believes that such a dialogue should include in its ambit such impediments to development as the international financial architecture and the imposition of impossibly harsh timetables for globalization. The economic engagement with ASEAN is thus based on these perspectives. Where a dialogue is sought bilaterally and multilaterally with countries of the region to harmonize positions on key issues of development, trade and investment, and environment.¹¹

India's outlook is entirely in harmony with the high-resolution road map of development priorities and regional integration, which was drawn up in the Hanoi Plan of Action and its vision Twenty Twenty (2020). India's follow the same logic in exploring the possible linkages between the ASEAN Free Trade Area and India to increase trade and investment flows in directions, which would promote growth and development. Thus, India possess an impressive catalogue of congruencies in outlook and platforms for joint action with Malaysia.¹²

India had a fruitful annual dialogue with the European Union at the Summit level. It is considered it in the mutual interest of both ASEAN and India that possessed a similar institution. If India and Malaysia intensify the interaction and synchronize actions in world fora, they can together form a formidable force working for global peace and security, equitable economic development, and social justice.¹³

Malaysia is a modern Islamic nation, but 49 percent of its citizens follow other faiths. Two million of its people are of ethnic Indian origin. It is a multi-

religious multi-ethnic society. India's relations with that country are ancient and go well back to the pre-Christian era. Malaysian Indians are active in the nation's political life. Malaysian Indian Congress, the oldest political party in Malaysia, is a partner in the ruling National Front of Malaysia.

It is sad for a country like India that espoused the Asian cause even before its own independence in 1947, that she should only be a dialogue partner with ASEAN. India should not only have been a part of ASEAN, but should have led a much larger economic formation in Asia. That is another story. One can blame the cold war and failure of Indian foreign policy during that era.¹⁴

Following the Chinese perfidy of 1961, Jawaharlal Nehru died in 1964 before he could work out changes to the foreign policy of India. In the period from October 1962 to May 1964 he worked himself to death in rebuilding India's armed forces. Generation of Indians that followed Nehru just forgot all about Indian foreign policy and clung onto the one he was definitely in the process of changing. The result was India's virtual negation of Asia.

The geographical locale of India is such that she is at the heart of Asia part extending right into South East Asia. It is a pity that the country has not developed Andaman and Nicobar islands the way they should have been to play an important role in their neighbourhood. India is also placed close to the Middle East or West Asia as it is now known and her maritime interests make her littoral partner of Africa. That is the area, which should be of priority to India in terms of developing bilateral relations.¹⁵

Atal Behari Vajpayee in his short term has managed to give a new thrust to the foreign policy. It now serves the nation and is taking it closer to its continental friends in Asia. The manner in which several Malaysian companies are now involved in India's highways project augurs well for not just South-South co-operation, but Asia collaborating together for its development. Malaysia's response in considering one of its biggest railways building projects to be built by an Indian company too shows that the countries are prepared to help each other. It is in that spirit that India agreed to reconsider the issue of customs duties on Palm oil.¹⁶

Atal Behari Vajpayee's travels abroad are decidedly marked by not just advancing India's position, but rebuilding relationships with nations he visits. His visit to Malaysia did not come a day too late. It was long overdue even though it had to be postponed due to the tragic earthquake in Gujarat. The intervening period of six years when there had been a face to face contact between the leaders of India and Malaysia was long enough to cause misgivings about each other's position on vital issues of the day, some of concern to India. Yes, we can blame it on the political instability of sorts.¹⁷

Malaysia recognises India's vast advances in science and technology, and did not hesitate to acknowledge this. In 1993, a team from the National Science Centre of Malaysia visited science centres in several Indian cities to study how to run their own centre. A bilateral agreement on cooperation in the field of Science and Technology was signed during the visit of Shri Murlu Manohar Joshi, the Minister of Human Resource Development and of Science and Technology in September 1998.

Under the India-ASEAN programme of cooperation in the field of Science and Technology also, both countries had opportunities of exchanging views. In August-September, 2000 a seminar on advance materials was organized in Kuala Lumpur under this programme, which was attended by the Secretary, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, under the Agreement on Science and Technology.¹⁸

Malaysia had proposed Civil Aviation talks between the two countries in view of the fact that the existing air links are not sufficient to meet the growing tourist and business traffic apart from the normal traffic on account of family ties. The traffic has grown by 8.5% 1999 and thus necessitated talks on Civil Aviation. These were held in Kuala Lumpur in August 2000 followed by meeting in Delhi in September where it was agreed to grant a additional quota of 1500 seats per week out of unutilized share of 3900 seats allocated to Air India. Malaysian Airlines were also given new destinations in Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad.¹⁹

Teams from Indian National Defence College (NDC) visited Malaysia in June 1997 & June 1999, while the Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College delegation visited

India in September, 1997. INS Delhi participated in the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition, Malaysia, 1997(LIMA' 97) in December 1997 and favourably impressed the Malaysians. India also participated in the Sixth Defence Services Exhibition held in Kuala Lumpur in April 1998. The Malaysia India Defence Cooperation Meeting (MIDCOM) was held in New Delhi in May 1997. The next MIDCOM meeting was to be held in Kuala Lumpur in the second half of 2000. CNS visited Malaysia (Dec. 14-18, 1997) and delivered a lecture on "Indian Navy in the year 2010" before the Maritime Institute of Malaysia (MIMA). INS 'Krishna' and INS 'Tir' visited Malaysia on a goodwill visit in March 1999. Chief of Army Staff General V.P. Malik visited Malaysia on a day's working visit on 22 February 1999 and exchanged views with Malaysian officials.²⁰

At the invitation of the Prime Minister of Malaysia Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Malaysia from 13th to 16th May, 2001. At the end of the delegation level talks with the Government of Malaysia on 14th May, 2001, the following Government-to-Government agreements/MOUs were signed in the presence of the Prime Ministers of Malaysia and India.

1. Agreement between the Government of Malaysia and the Government of the Republic of India on Exemption of the Visa Requirement for holders of Diplomatic and Official Passports.
2. Agreement between the Government of Malaysia and the Government of the Republic of India for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to Taxes on Income.
3. MOU between the Government of Malaysia and the Government of the Republic of India on Mutual Cooperation relating to Investment, Construction, Privatisation and Management of Seaports in India.
4. Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of Malaysia on the Cooperation on Information and Technology and Services.

5. Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Malaysia and the Government of Republic of India on Cooperation in the field of Civil Service, Personnel Management and Public Administration.
6. Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Malaysia (Ministry of Transport), and IRCON International Ltd. for Double Tracking and Electrification of Ipoh-Padang Besar Section KTM Line.
7. Memorandum of Understanding between Securities Commission of Malaysia and the Securities and Exchange Board of India in relation to Assistance and Mutual Cooperation.²¹

A eight member delegation led by Shri Ravindra Varma, Chairman from the National Commission on labour, Ministry of labour visited Malaysia from 11th to 13th January 2002. The aim of the visit was to study the labour laws, their implementation etc. with specific reference to social security net, industrial relations, productivity and wages and competitiveness in Malaysia.²²

During Vajpayee's period the relationship between the two countries got temporarily jerked due to India's nuclear test in May 1998. India however later justified its Test by making the point of her security. Malaysia was later fully convinced that India must possess deterrent to secure itself. On the issue of Jammu and Kashmir Malaysia once again fully supported India's stand and strongly condemned cross border terrorism. The two countries further stood in intimate friendly lines on the issue of drug trafficking, money laundering and religious extremism. Vajpayee like his predecessors could achieve a very high degree of diplomatic win. Many new Joint ventures were also established in Vajpayee's four years rule.

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CONCLUSION

The final appreciations of the work provides positive trend in the ever growing relationship between the two nations and gives an opportunity for optimistic predictions for the future projection of the relationship in ambit of which lies unprecedented potentials of the two nations which hitherto remains unexploited for various reasons.

The most basic historical factor, which unite India with Malaysia is civilisational bond formed on the foundations of spiritual, cultural and commercial ground. The cross fertilization of human experiences resulted into the ushering of a new glorious era for the two nations. Evidence of this confluence between India South East Asia abounds in the art, architecture, language and culture of every ASEAN country.

India from the very beginning felt the need of developing intimate relations with the Malaysia to prevent the domination of the region by the communist or Western powers. India felt that super power struggles in the region as a positive threat to it's stability and emphasised the need of keeping the South and South East Asia free from the influence of the Super Powers.

India and Malaysia have much in common. They are friends and neighbours who share common experiences of foreign domination and the problems of development. After independence, both countries have dedicated their efforts to the well-being of their people. As members of the Commonwealth as well as of the family of Non-aligned nations, India and Malaysia have worked together in the cause of world peace and international cooperation.

India's relations with Malaysia has always been close and cordial, a relations which stems from the long historic links between the two peoples. India's inspiring leadership among the new nations in Asia and Africa, has been proved to be boon in Malaysia's struggle for freedom. No less important is the fact that a sizeable section of Malaysians are of Indian origin, coming from various parts of the great sub-continent with invaluable contribution to the economic and cultural life of Malaysia.

It was Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Malaysia in 1946, much before their anticipated freedom that laid the solid foundations for Indo-Malaysia relationship. Nehru had vision not just for the world in the second half of the 20th century, but firmly believed in resurgence of Asia during this period. From a sleepy colonial county of 1946, Malaysia is a modern vibrant nation of 21st century seeking a place in the frontline of developed countries. Elsewhere in East Asia too, progress and mitigation of poverty has made qualitative difference to the lives of the people.

In the early years of Malaysia's independence, its bilateral ties with India were extremely close and friendly. India was admired for its leadership of the decolonisation movement (Pandit Nehru had visited Kuala Lumpur in 1946 and Penang in 1954). Malaysia extended diplomatic support to India during the Chinese invasion of 1962 (even setting up a 'Save Democracy Fund'). During the Indo-Pakistan conflict of 1965, certain remarks in the United Nations by the Malaysian Representative provoked Pakistan to snap ties with Malaysia. However, this has to be seen against the background of Malaysia's strained relations with China in the '60s on account of the latter's support of the communist insurgency. Relations with Indonesia were under severe strain on account of Konfrontasi and Pakistan's close relations with China and Indonesia were a decisive factor in shaping Malaysian

attitudes. India successfully engineered Malaysia's entry into the NAM against Indonesian opposition. Smt. Indira Gandhi visited Malaysia in 1968. All Malaysian Prime Ministers, beginning with Tunku Abdul Rahman, have visited India several times.

The politics of Indian Ocean also influenced India's relations with the countries of South East Asia. As most of the countries of South East Asia were in the Indian Ocean littoral, they felt the need of improving relations with India and demanded creation of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean region. However, India could not fully subscribe to the views of the South East Asian countries specially Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines, which opposed deployment of both the super powers. Their stand, however, underwent a change as a result of the Soviet role in Afghanistan and Kampuchea and they moved in favour of a power balance rather than a withdrawal of the foreign powers from the region.

There were reasons for believing that Malaysian support for India in the event of a conflict with China or Pakistan might be less pronounced in the future than it has been in the past. Malaysia was the first to come out in India's support when China attacked her in 1962. Her support for India in the conflict with Pakistan in 1965 led to the rupture of her diplomatic relations with Pakistan. But such unequivocal and one-sided support cannot be taken for granted for all time Malaysian feels. However, Malaysia always maintained her neutrality on the issue of Kashmir problem.

Malaysian were not hostile to China. They were, however, afraid of the militant postures of the present regime in Red China and wished to feel closer to India than they do at present. Although they did not have any diplomatic relations with China-or for that matter, with any other communist country - they had a flourishing trade with China

through third parties via Hong Kong. In economic matter, they have an "open door" policy and are not isolationists in any sense. They are not averse to close identification with any country outside what they consider South East Asia. Closer trade and developmental cooperation with India would fit in well with this policy

The Malaysians have a fairly clear notion of what they want from India. First and foremost they expect more visible signs of recognition. They want India to become more friendly with them. This could be done in many ways-tourism being the most important among them. The exchange of young tourists, mostly students could become easier when the Asian highway link with Malaysia is completed

Malaysia is the one Muslim country, which has given "unqualified" support to India so far in her troubles with Pakistan is concerned. This apart, she has not thought of squeezing out the large population of Indian settlers. The friendship of the ordinary Malaysian towards Indians can also be seen from the fact that Malay employees of Indian firms in Kuala Lumpur work with a "sense of belonging" which often surpasses that of the Indian staff.

To a technology savvy Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the evidence of India's immense technological base, as an important source of supply for inputs in the growing manufacturing sectors of the Malaysian economy was enough justification for enhanced ties. That Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was also a technophile, and favoured economic policies for accelerating India's modernisation, helped. A meeting of minds between the two Prime Ministers Rajiv Gandhi and Mahathir Mohammad, during their interactions at the Commonwealth summit in Bahamas in 1985, and at the eighth NAM summit in Zimbabwe, brought greater warmth to the relationship. In 1987, Dr. Mahathir broke with protocol to make an official visit to India. This was

done despite the disappointment that the Malaysians had felt when our Prime Minister visited Indonesia and Thailand but was unable to visit Malaysia despite several hints thrown our way by the local establishment. It was seen here that this was perhaps the result of Dr. Mahathir's having visited the countries in the neighbourhood of India while having neglected to visit India. However, the fact remains that Dr. Mahathir took the initiative to visit New Delhi in January 1987.

In the 90s, the visit of India's Prime Minister V.P Singh to Malaysia for the inaugural G-15 Summit in 1990, followed by a bilateral visit, added a new dimension to the relationship between the two countries. It was decided in principle to upgrade the official level Joint Committee to that of a Joint Commission at the level of Foreign Minister. Broader inter-action of political decision-makers was also discussed. Efforts were to be directed to more balanced trade at higher levels. A decision was taken to cooperate on solar energy, promote tourism, examine increasing the frequency of airline flights, look into the possibility of opening a branch of a Malaysian bank in India and an Indian bank in Malaysia and view positively the issue of medical seats for Malaysian students wishing to study in India.

The cold war moulds have been broken and this has enabled India to strengthen the links without ideological barriers. India became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992, full dialogue partner in 1995 and member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996.

In December 1993, Mahathir visited India for the G-15 Summit, but owing to lack of a quorum, the meeting was converted into a bilateral one. In their one-on-one discussions, the two Prime Ministers Mahathir Mohammad and Narasimha Rao stressed the need for closer bilateral co-operation at the political, economic and commercial levels. Mahathir suggested identifying specific areas and projects for co-

operation. He offered to share Malaysia's experience in privatization with India. Five MOUs were signed in railway construction, telecommunications, rubber, professional education and air-conditioning.

In March 1994, Dr. Mahathir again visited India for the G-15 Summit. He was accompanied by a group of businessmen. During his meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, he reiterated Malaysia's interest in co-operating with India in satellite communications, telecom and power, with co-operation in the power and roads sectors on a priority basis. In an October 1994 speech in Japan, Mahathir referred to the emerging business opportunities as a "less socialist" India "opens its doors".

Prime Minister Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao's visit to Malaysia in August 1995 gave a fresh impetus to bilateral economic relations. A 25-member business delegation accompanied the Prime Minister. During his stay in Malaysia several MOUs and Agreements were signed envisaging co-operation in Malaysia's space programme, satellite telecasting, development of highways, protection and promotion of investments, promotion of industrial co-operation. Several new areas of bilateral co-operation were identified. The visit was followed by two major business seminars in Kuala Lumpur organised by the CII and the FICCI/ASSOCHAM in December 1995 and March 1996, on business and investment opportunities in India. In March 1996, several MOUs between Malaysian and Tamil Nadu companies were signed in Madras.

In November 1996, the two Prime Ministers Mahathir Mohammad and Narasimha Rao met in Harare during the G-15 Summit. There was agreement on the vast scope for bilateral co-operation in education, satellite communications, defence, infrastructure (roads, ports, airports) and automobiles.

In December 1996, Dr. Mahathir received the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding in New Delhi. During his stay in India some agreements for co-operation between the private sectors of the two countries were signed in his presence. He visited ISRO in Bangalore which generated several ideas on bilateral interaction in space technology. During his meeting with Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, Dr. Mahathir described "co-operation between India and Malaysia as the lynchpin for South-South co-operation". He expressed his willingness to send Malaysian students to India instead of the developed countries "if you can accommodate them". During his visit, Dr. Mahathir also delivered the inaugural India-ASEAN Eminent Person Series lecture.

In the larger context of Indo-Pakistan relations, Malaysia has tended to "box" the two countries and adopt an artificially "balanced" position vis-a-vis India irrespective of the intrinsic nature of our ties. Thus on Kashmir, while privately expressing "understanding" for the complicated situation, Malaysia has found it politic to go along with the strong OIC resolutions, and consider Kashmir a "disputed territory". At the OIC Extraordinary Summit Conference in Islamabad in March 1997, Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim repeated the Malaysian call for an amicable solution to the Kashmir issue in accordance with the United Nations resolutions and the Simla Agreement. It is to be noted that during his March 1997 trade promotion visit, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Dr. Farooq Abdullah was able to meet Foreign Minister Badawi and Economic Adviser to Government Tun Daim despite the Malaysian Foreign Office's reluctance to give any kind of official sanction to the visit.

The friendly ties between India and Malaysia have gained further impetus during the last few years with the increasing

participation by India investors and industrialist in the economic and social programmes. The establishment of the United Asian Bank Berhad, the Uni-Tata Mill in Perak, the Lakshmi Textiles in Negri Sembilan and the planned entry of the Mafatlal Group in joint venture enterprises to name only a few-are indicative of the growing interest on the part of Indian entrepreneurs in this country and their realization of immense prospects to be gained in meaning full endeavour through cooperation. Being a young nation, it is also the desire and hope to accelerate Malaysia's scientific and technological advancement in line with India long-term goal of building a progressive and modern industrial society. Malaysia's in inviting the participation of all friendly countries, regardless of their economic framework or political philosophy is in keeping with India's stand and conviction as non-aligned nation.

Between 1980 and 1994, 88 projects from India involving a total capital investment of US \$ 234 million were approved. Some of them folded up. The first Indian joint venture in Malaysia, Godrej (M) Sdn Bhd, commenced operation in 1968. Indeed in the seventies and eighties, there were over 40 Indian joint ventures, the largest with any country. India's involvement in projects in Malaysia are mainly in power generation, transportation and construction of bridges. India has also established an advanced training centre for industrial training activities. Today, India is Malaysia's largest trading partner in South Asia, the two countries having had longstanding economic ties dating back to the past. Excluding ASEAN and China, India is also Malaysia's largest trading partner among the countries of the South. The balance of trade has been in Malaysia's favour, largely because of large scale imports of palm-oil constituting 20-23% of Malaysia's total production.

Since the liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991, Malaysia had taken a keen and close interest in the developments there. After early trickles, Malaysians invested over \$ 400 millions in 1990

alone, looking for more openings. Mr. Deepak Vohra, the then Acting Indian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur said, all agreements signed during the visit of former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao were being followed up and implemented. The cooperation promised in development of Malaysia's space programme, including the training of personnel, had been implemented along with consultancy. Doordarshan and Malaysian Broadcasting Network services of Measat were finalising arrangements for the setting up of a joint venture to provide "direct to users" services.

Malaysia is one of the most progressive countries in South East Asia. She is keen on improving economic relations with India, but feels that the latter is somewhat slow in appreciating her gesture.

Having sorted out her major problems with Indonesia and Singapore, Malaysia now looks at her relations with India in clearer perspective. She sees the whole of South East Asia as a vast "common market" with unlimited potential. At the same time, Malaysian economic experts feel that as member of the larger community of the developing nations, India and Malaysia can cooperate for their mutual benefit in "specific" areas on a bilateral basis. Their view is that in this matter India has been somewhat slow in appreciating Malaysia's gesture.

Malaysia's foreign and economic policies are all dictated by one overriding objective : finding a place in the sun for Malays spread over Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines. Malaysia felt that her people have been exploited for centuries by Europeans and Chinese. She feels, that India can play a definite role in helping Malaysians to achieve greater economic progress. Malaysians also have high hopes from ASEAN formed in August 1967 for economic and cultural cooperation. The organisation includes Malaysia Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. An "open invitation" has been extended to Burma, Cambodia, Laos and the two Vietnams to make

ASEAN a compact and homogenous community. Malaysian leaders do not see how any other nation can fit into this group.

The other areas – besides reciprocation of “warm friendship” – where Malaysia expects a response from India is in providing technical know how and expanding trade. Malaysia spends as much as 20 per cent of her revenue on education to catch up with the advanced countries. She has extended an open invitation to India to do what she can to supply the men and the know-how. Malaysian experts say they would welcome Indian collaboration in new industries and would also welcome Indian products. They are conscious of the numerous difficulties. But they point out : Let us at least sit down and talk and make a beginning somewhere”.

Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee’s visit to Malaysia and his thrust on the country’s foreign policy to “Look East” should become an eye opener for India’s economic planners. The tremendous progress made by the countries of South East Asia should set them to think of the weaknesses in India’s system of planning for economic development. The last Indian Prime Minister(I.K. Gujral) visited Malaysia was in 1997. Dr. Mahathir Mohammad in his long tenure as Malaysia’s Prime Minister visited India five times beginning in 1983 with his last visit in 1996. He must have seen a lot and can thus gauge the progress made by this country in the intervening period. Not much to show in comparison with this.

Over the last few years, India have consciously focused on rejuvenation of its ties with the countries of ASEAN. This came to be known as “Look East” policy. But even as India looked east, ASEAN moved west. The admission of new countries brought ASEAN literally to India’s doors. From a maritime neighbour ASEAN became that close

neighbour with a land border of nearly 1600 Kms. This has added a new dimension in relations.

India attached to expand trade and commercial ties with Malaysia. The participation of the two Prime Ministers underscored the shared vision of enhancing the Malaysia-India partnership in the 21st century.

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