

ON THE CHESSBOARD OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC :

INDIA and the Inter-play of Powers

Introduction

Since the beginning of this millennium , the name India appears with increasing frequency and recognition in the international discourse on politics or economics, food crisis or global climate issue or outsourcing. China entered global consciousness several years ago . India seems to be following suit in that direction. Be it the recent food shortages, jump in the oil price or the issue of global warming and climate change, responsibility is being pinned on the consumption in the populous and rapidly growing economies of China and India. At the G-8 in Japan in July 2008 President Bush had said that any agreement on climate change depended on the participation of China and India.¹ A few months back he had termed the improving living standards in India and other developing countries as a possible reason for the global food shortage. The U.S presidential candidate from the Republican party, Senator McCain has suggested that ‘ the West should ensure that the G-8, the group of eight highly industrialized sates , becomes again a club of leading market democracies: it should include Brazil and India but exclude Russia.’² India, along with four other emerging economies has already been included as ‘outreach’ countries at the G-8 summit. The EU leaders have proposed that China and India should be included for more extensive engagement from the next year.³

Clearly, there is realization around the world that the emerging economies especially of China and India , with their

huge market , demographic advantage and vast growth potential are likely to rise for several years to come and therefore in the changing global order they need to be co-opted so as to become 'responsible stake-holders'. This has been already expressed in the case of China. Robert Zoellick , the President of the World Bank , called China a 'responsible stake-holder' in the international system.

The emerging India seems to be pursuing its domestic and foreign policies with clear goals in sight. Socio-economic progress of its billion plus population and elimination of wide-spread poverty are main priorities. For achieving these, the foreign policy also needed to be adapted accordingly. India's well planned pursuit in the past decade and a half of friendly and cooperative relations with its neighbors as well as major powers around the world appears in line with the above approach . In this context its relationship with the countries of the Asia-Pacific assumes importance . How India handles its relations with the major powers in the Asia-Pacific will largely determine its future place in this important region and the world at large.

Signposts of the New Era

The new millennium unfolded two far -reaching developments. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre buildings and the Pentagon , the symbols of the world's only superpower, showed in a ghastly and violent manner that the emerging global order was not acceptable to certain elements and that they would resort to any dastardly acts of terror to challenge it. The other development which, in fact, had been taking place for sometime is the extraordinary rise of China in military and economic terms. The emergence or rather re-emergence of China has demonstrated that power equations from the Cold War days were no more tenable and there was imperative need for a major change as new power centers were emerging, especially in the

Asia-Pacific. It is discernible that the centre of gravity of the global economy is shifting to Asia. It is also a peculiar coincidence that the U.S and NATO (founded as an Atlantic North American-European alliance) powers are today heavily engaged in the Asian countries, Iraq, Afghanistan and Afghanistan-Pakistan border for battling radical Islamic elements. The outcome of these wars will inevitably have deep influence on the political landscape of not only Asia but the world at large. These developments along with the sudden rise in the price of oil, which again is largely sourced from the Persian Gulf places Asia at the centre stage of global geopolitics and geo-economics.

Another equally defining story that is unfolding in Asia is the rapid elimination of poverty of huge populations. Actually, poverty reduction is occurring everywhere including in Africa and Latin America, but nowhere is it so massive as in Asia, especially China and India. In a short span of a generation, hundreds of millions of poor people have been lifted from destitution and given new life and hope. Indeed, one reason why the United Nations will actually meet one of its Millennium Development Goals of reducing poverty by 2015 will be the success of China and India in reducing poverty significantly.⁴ As Lawrence Summers, the former Harvard President describes the rise of Asia, 'At current growth rates in Asia standards may rise 110 fold, 10000 per cent within a life span. The rise of Asia and all that follows it will be the dominant story in history books written 300 years from now with the Cold War and rise of Islam as secondary stories.'⁵

The rise of China and in recent years that of India mark the developments of extra-ordinary significance given the fact that together they constitute over one third of humanity. In the Asia-Pacific, Japan has already been a major economic power for past 3-4 decades, and indeed even before the World War II. However, seldom before in history there was a situation as it obtains today that three major powers are simultaneously rising in Asia. This is creating a new dynamic which is expected to shake the current politico-security or economic equations in the Asia-Pacific. A

different order is in the offing in which considerable strategic adjustments would occur in the coming years.

When a new era starts in history, existing institutions need to phase out though they usually linger on or take different shape. This is especially true in the Asia-Pacific where a 'structure built to defend Asia against the Soviet Union , and for a while against the Sino-Soviet alliance still persists ' ⁶ Military alliances still exist and the institutions created to synergize security and economic revival continue. In the meantime, the technologically advanced Japan appears to assert itself to secure a 'normal nation' status; a resurgent China in embracing globalization accepts Western economic and financial norms; a rising India adopts economic reforms and embarks upon high growth trajectory and the regional grouping ASEAN comes of age with adopting a formal Charter and committing itself to creating a community within a defined time-frame.

Emerging Geopolitical Architecture in the Asia-Pacific

Is the present geopolitical architecture in the Asia-Pacific adequate and appropriate to deal with the critical issues of security and stability of more than half the population of the world or would it require major changes or adjustments ? Will the U.S through its alliances be able to handle the complex situation in the Asia-Pacific ? Could there possibly be a tacit understanding between the U.S and China that despite their differences in political ideology or values they would together seek to oversee the 'macro-management' of the Asia-Pacific? What would be the nature of reaction of the democracies of Asia, namely, Japan, India, Indonesia to any such attempt? What new forms of institutional architecture can be expected or can realistically take shape in the coming years and decades even as tectonic shifts in power are occurring across the world? Who will be the main actors? Will

there be resistance from the ‘old and established’ players to the ‘new’ ones and if so, why? Would the old order give place to the new without major convulsions? These and similar question marks appear before us as we begin addressing the issues and power configurations in this region, and India’s position in the Asia-Pacific.

The U.S presence in the Asia-Pacific has been an omnipresent and effective factor ever since the end of the World War II. The U.S policies, political, strategic or economic, have profoundly impacted on the countries of the region. The U.S military alliance with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand or the Philippines and close defense relationship with Singapore, have been the mainstay of the U.S security policy in the region. While for Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore it provided the vital security anchor, for a long time it was a point of suspicion and discomfort for China, North Korea or Vietnam. Today these alliances in their present structure do not seem to meet the new politico-security challenges of the emerging Asia-Pacific.

The need for macro-management of security and peace in the Asia-Pacific had been felt for some time, especially after the end of the Cold War. At a time when the U.S emerged successful and pre-eminent after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and when the ASEAN had demonstrated its effectiveness following the withdrawal of Vietnam from Cambodia, the U.S and ASEAN found it useful to co-opt China and Russia and soon afterwards India in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the multilateral forum for security issues in the Asia-Pacific. Since the early 90’s there was constant search for a multilateral mechanism, be it on the political or economic side, to effectively manage the Asia-Pacific affairs. With the predominant influence of the U.S, particularly in the wake of its triumph in the Cold War, other major powers such as China and Russia showed no hesitation in joining multilateral groupings. In fact, there was keenness on part of most countries in the Asia-Pacific to join the groupings such as Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) or ARF. Subsequently, other

regional groupings have also come up in the Asia-Pacific such as ASEAN +3(China, Japan and Korea), the East Asia Summit (EAS) or the Six-Party Talks on the Nuclear Issues on the Korean Peninsula. Non-official level dialogues have also been started in the region to discuss issues relating to security or peace . They include the Singapore Shangri-la Dialogue at the level of Defense Ministers and senior officials from Asia-pacific nations as well as the U.S. or the Asian Co-operation Dialogue(ACD) started with the Thai initiative .

There has been a wide-spread perception in the region that since 9/11, the U.S priority and interest had shifted away from Southeast and East Asia and whatever attention the U.S paid it was primarily focused on the issue of terrorism. Robert Gates, the U.S Defense secretary in his speech at the Shangri-la Dialogue in Singapore in June 2008 tried to dispel this by assuring that the U.S was a ‘resident power’ in the Asia-Pacific region. Yet the impression about the U.S’s diminishing presence in Asia persists. In the wake of the Iraq war, anti-U.S sentiment grew rapidly in the Muslim-majority states of Southeast Asia. The U.S suggestion to provide maritime security in the Malacca Straits through the Regional Maritime Security Initiative(RMSI) in 2004 was strongly opposed by the littoral states , Malaysia and Indonesia. The inability of the U.S to persuade the Myanmar regime to accept the U.S aid delivered through its naval ships in the wake of the colossal human tragedy in May 2008 or the massive protests in South Korea against the U.S beef imports point to the questioning of the U.S influence in the region. The reasons for such view as also the apparent U.S priorities are analyzed subsequently. It would be important to see what policy framework the incoming U.S administration adopts in this context.

How real is the hype of shift of global power to Asia ?

In terms of the high and sustained growth trajectories of a number of Asian countries such as China, India, Vietnam and till recently Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia; their high savings rates and large foreign exchange reserves or the enormous market size of Asia amounting to nearly 3 billion the importance of these Asian countries cannot be over-emphasized. In terms of growth projections the future should clearly belong to Asian countries provided they are able to maintain internal political stability and reasonably high rates of economic growth. Today, the global wealth is, however, very unevenly distributed. It is largely in the hands of approximately 20 % of the world population. The potential of the emerging economies in the long term may not be in question. However, the argument that the uneven distribution of global wealth may not last long cannot necessarily hold good. After all, for more than two hundred years it has remained so. Moreover, whether the Asian giants, China and India will be able to bring their human development indexes on par with the developed countries of the West in a reasonable time frame is a moot question.

It is becoming increasingly clear that Asia's aggregate weight in terms of the demographics, growth rates, savings rates, technology absorption and above all , its newly acquired confidence cannot but put the oldest continent as a global leader, especially in the economic area. Historically, globalization began in Asia more than two millennia ago. It is seen that in recent years Asia has been quick to accept it on Western terms and pattern. Asian countries like Japan, Southeast Asian states and lately China , India and Vietnam have reaped huge benefits from it and continue to do so. Simultaneously, the West has also been a winner in this game . A different kind of interdependence not seen before has been developing between Asia and the West. If the market or capital are the primary drivers of globalization, Asia holds the aces in hand. At the same time, it is absorbing Western best practices and also innovating them in the process.

It can be argued whether the U.S or the West in general would accept the new reality of a resurgent Asia . Perhaps the issue is not so much whether they will accept it or not. If Asia indeed succeeds in rising in a sustained manner as it has been able to do in recent years, the world powers would no doubt recognize it accordingly. The main question would be in what manner would the West do it and what would be the equations that will develop in the process. As Bilahari Kausikan, Singapore's Permanent Secretary in the Foreign Ministry points out, ' For the rebalancing of the world to occur smoothly, with minimal frictions, China and other Asian countries would need to be even more pro-active. The West will be far too defensive and distracted to take the lead , and also, Asia has far more to lose. We should not underestimate the depth of western anxieties. Asia's growth, in particular China's rise, has challenged the western definition of self and the western view of its place in the world.'⁷ Of course, the West might not , to start with, accept the argument that it is in decline. As Fareed Zakaria writes in his book ' In the Post- American World' , it is not the U.S is in decline, but the rest of the world is rising.' We are now living through the third great power shift of the modern era. It could be called the 'rise of the rest.' ...In 2006 and 2007, 124 countries grew at 4% or more.'⁸

West, especially the U.S also does not seem fully seized with this phenomenon. The U.S is heavily pre-occupied with Iraq and global terrorism. Even the Presidential candidates in their pronouncements so far have not apparently focused on the rise of several countries. It appears that for its own interests, the U.S would need to work with China and India on issues like energy or global warming.

There is also another view point about the rise of China and India and the shifting of the centre of gravity to Asia. It is contended that these developments extraordinary as they may appear need not be taken as a foregone conclusion. After all they would depend upon several assumptions. Can Asia indeed sustain high growth rates

over next 25-30 years? If China's growth rate were to come down due to internal situation from 10% to 7 or 8 %, and if the U.S rate were to go up from 3% to 3.5% , this will make a big difference for China to catch up with the U.S., especially with respect to military spending since the U.S economy is so much larger than China's. Similarly, India's economy could also falter on a variety of factors such as lack of adequate energy, or slow labor reforms or domestic political disturbances.

The sudden high rise of oil in the first half of 2008 and the resulting surge in inflation across much of Asia has thrown the fast growing economies of Asia off gear. This has its political fallout in riots, violence and disturbances occurring in many countries. In India, the inflation rate which was only about 5 per cent last year crossed 11 per cent in July 2008 putting considerable pressure on the government which will be facing a general election next year. Only a few months ago the Asian economies looked strong and secure. Today, their weakness to withstand the energy price hike only shows how financially vulnerable they can be. This also brings back the painful memory of the Asian financial crisis only 10 years ago when vibrant economies like Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea suffered from vast scale shutdowns, unemployment and socio-political upheaval.

Moreover, there are factors such as ageing populations, gender ratios etc. Japan's and China's populations are ageing and therefore their economies would increasingly become welfare oriented devoting large outlays on health rather than productive investment. The U.S does not suffer from such problem. India, too, does not face this type of difficulty; on the other hand, India will have a substantial proportion of its population at a young age and as a result, could benefit from a democratic dividend. In the coming years, China, and India to some extent, may have a disproportionately large male - female ratio which could perhaps lead to social tension .Besides, there are several issues such as the lack of availability of water, poor agricultural productivity and consequently inadequate food security, environmental degradation

etc. which could affect developing countries like China and India harder than a developed nation such as the United States. Therefore, it may be premature to conclude that China or India could bridge the gap between them and the U.S in the coming 3-4 decades to 'usher in an Asian century'. Yet another argument which is advanced in the West with regard to Asia's re-emergence is that there is no such entity as Asia. Economist.com of April 9, 2008 raises the question 'Does Asia exist?' It is questioned whether Asia is anything more than a handy cartographical term. It is further suggested that Asia is undergoing its 'deepest integration' ever.⁹ Perhaps what this means is that while some Asian countries could individually grow rapidly and become powerful in the coming years, it does not suggest that the 'hype about the rise of Asia as a whole' might be true.

This debate would no doubt go on for some time. What is important to factually note is that even if the Goldman & Sach's prediction that by 2050 China will be the largest economy followed by the U.S and India were to come true, it does not suggest that China and India would have their large populations reaching the standard of living or human security level comparable to the U.S or Europe. It should also be noted that the march of the European countries towards forging an European Union with a common currency, a common foreign and security policy and a customs union is an epoch-making development and puts them far ahead of the Asia-Pacific which is still not close to any substantive regionalism, comparable to that of the EU. Furthermore, as western analysts point out that the technologies and industries of the future such as biotech, nanotechnology, space or aviation are still primarily centered in the West. Among the top twenty global companies involved in advance designing and engineering in civil aviation, only one is Asian. (from Japan) Thus, Asia is still primarily working within the framework of modernization process conceived and developed by the West. It is basically replicating the western model and experience in post-industrialization

processes or corporate management. China or India have also not rejected it. Even Japan, the economic powerhouse of Asia, joined the western ranks by acquiring western skills and methods as far back as the mid-nineteenth century. Another Asian industrial giant, South Korea, too has primarily relied on western technology and corporate management.

This may show that there is no inherent conflict between the west and Asia over the path of economic or technological advancement. On the other hand, considerable similarities and complementarity can be discerned between their experiences. Of course, there are clear and distinct growth stories of the Asian players. India is at once an ancient civilization, a modern nation grounded in Enlightenment values and democratic institutions, and a rising twenty-first-century power.¹⁰ India's development in the post-independence period was driven by its pluralistic democracy based on peace and self-motivation. Methods which were employed to eliminate large scale poverty included both government commitment and support as well as people's voluntary participation. China, South Korea or ASEAN states have followed their own ways consistent with their socio-political ideologies or cultural mores.

Happily, today, the shift in focus to economics which is being witnessed everywhere is opening up new possibilities. In most Asian countries there is a discernible consensus on this approach. In India, for instance, there have been 6-7 governments belonging to different parties and ideologies in the past 17 years since the economic reforms were initiated in 1991. However, all governments have placed highest priority to economic reforms and rapid socio-economic progress. Today, it is no more a zero-sum game as in geopolitics; on the other hand, it can be a win-win game for both. It may perhaps sound ironical, but West's continued economic and technological success will remain an important factor for the stability and peace of the Asia-Pacific and act like a beacon which will be critically related to the policy formulation of China, Japan, India, Russia and Southeast Asian

countries in their interaction with the world. It is against this background that the interaction amongst the major players of the Asia-Pacific needs to be analyzed.

Peace in the Asia-Pacific: Can it be durable and sustained?

One notable feature of the geopolitical environment in the Asia-Pacific today is that the major pieces on the chessboard are placed in positions which are not threatening each other. They may have some serious dispute or bilateral problem dividing them. For example, China and Japan continue to carry their age-old animosity and prejudice; the Japanese leaders' visits to the Yasukuni Shrine is a very sensitive point in the relationship. They have a longstanding territorial dispute over Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands. However, in the last year or two, highest level efforts have been made on both sides to reduce their mutual differences. The Chinese President Hu Jintao visited Japan in May 2008. 'He and the Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda signed a blueprint for ties that represented a 'new starting point 'with regular top-level visits in future and both military and cultural exchanges.'¹¹ Japan- Korea rivalry and antipathy to each other also goes back centuries. They, too, have a territorial dispute over the Tokdo/Takeshima Island. Japan and Russia have a long festering problem over the Kurile islands. In South China Sea, five countries (Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, the Philippines and Taiwan) are locked with China in a dispute over the Spratlys Islands though they have now signed a Code of Conduct on this issue. China – Taiwan issue remains a major source of confrontation and a possible flashpoint in the Asia-Pacific although the victory of the KMT under Ma Ying-Jeon as the new President in the recent election in Taiwan is hoped to lead to some reconciliation between China and Taiwan. The China-India border dispute still remains unresolved and cannot be ruled out as a cause for a conflict in the region. Similarly, the India-

Pakistan dispute on Kashmir remains a major contention between the two though in recent years the peace process between them has helped to reduce the bilateral tension to some extent.

Significantly, all Asia-Pacific powers appear to have chosen to put their contentious bilateral issues on the backburner . As a result, for the past 2-3 decades there has not been any major military conflict between any of these powers. There has been thus a peace dividend in the Asia-Pacific from which countries of the region have benefited. In fact, the absence of open warfare, especially since the end of the Cold War can be described as a principal factor for the sustained and uninterrupted economic development that has characterized the Asia-Pacific region. First Japan, then the 'flying geese' or 'economic tigers' such as South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan followed by Southeast Asian countries and subsequently China and now India. In this successful story , a clear-cut relationship can be observed between the policy of peace and economic progress.

The recent elections in Taiwan resulting in Ma Ying-Jeon's victory as the new President could expectedly usher in an era of reduced tension and greater stability between China and Taiwan and also China and the U.S. President Ma has called for warmer ties with Beijing and made his intention clear that he will not be supporting declaration of independence. Whether this new development will sustain depends upon several factors, least among those could be China's growing expectations from Ma. China might hope that Ma would take steps towards reunification which could be achieved during Ma's term of office. The reality, however, appeared to be different. Ma would need to take into account that over 30% of Taiwanese population favored independence. At the same time China was not likely to slow down steps it had started with the context of Taiwan , namely, build-up of the navy, production of sub-marines, ballistic missiles etc. This equipment and preparation could be useful to China in its conflicts with other countries.

U.S –Preponderant Power in the Asia-Pacific

Ever since the end of the World War II , the U.S had established a web of military alliances and close relationships with a number of countries of the Asia-Pacific. During the long drawn-out Cold War these served their security needs. Today, the main objective appears to be defense against a militarily modernizing and strengthening China. Evidently, for the U.S the underlying concern is the safety and stability of the western Pacific in case its strategic interests in Taiwan, Japan or South Korea came under threat from China for some internal or external reason. In that situation, peace and security which have been the sine qua non for the progress of Asia-Pacific nations for past several decades would be threatened. If , however, the Chinese continued to demonstrate that for them peace and stability were essential priorities for sustained socio-economic development in the future , and in their ‘peaceful rise’ they would rather act as a ‘responsible stake-holder’ than a possible ‘de-stabilizer’, then the security need which the allies and friendly countries in the region expect from the U.S might not last for a long time.

A few examples from the prevalent situation in the region could be cited to validate the above . China and five countries(four from ASEAN and Taiwan) were able to defuse their conflict in the South China Sea over the contentious issue of sovereignty of the Spratlys Islands with the signing of the Manila Declaration in 1992 and a Code of Conduct. This has apparently helped to create a better atmosphere among them. Today , China and the Philippines are engaged in defense cooperation. China – Vietnam relations have seen considerable improvement in recent years. Australia, a close ally of the U.S , has forged such extensive economic and commercial ties with China that today the two are linked by growing interdependence. China’s diplomatic and investment initiatives with several Asian countries including neighbors in Southeast, South and Central Asia places it in a unique position.

China also seems to be recreating, redefining culture. In doing so China is going back to its socio-cultural roots and rediscovering itself. Confucianism which was an anathema during Mao's time is being revived. Confucian centers are opened in several countries around the world with the Chinese government support. 'Soft power' a term coined by Prof Nye of Harvard University is being employed by China everywhere, especially in developing countries for seeking goodwill and support. As Joshua Kurlantzick argues in his book 'Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World', 'In a short period of time, China appears to have created a systematic, coherent soft power strategy, and a set of soft power tools to implement that strategy.' 'China's recent reliance on soft power- diplomacy, trade incentives, cultural and educational exchange opportunities and other techniques- is enabling China to project a benign national image, position itself as a model of social and economic success and develop stronger international alliances.'¹² While the neighboring Asian countries may not easily give up their wariness against China on account of deep historical animosity, they are not likely to be averse to developing close cooperation with China, especially in the economic field.

Countries of the Asia-Pacific have seen how the war in Iraq and Afghanistan has taken a huge toll of the U.S energy, resources and time leading to a discernible lowering of its interest and attention to the Asia-Pacific. These wars again brought the presence of the massive U.S military presence to Asia after the end of the Gulf war in the early 90s and the U.S support to the Mujahideen in their resistance to the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 80s. As a result, the U.S military involvement and deployment has now spread across the whole Asian continent- from NE Asia to SE Asia to South and West Asia. After 9/11 the U.S focus was seen to be centered primarily on the issue of terrorism. Even at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a trans-continental forum mainly devoted to economic cooperation, counter-terrorism became the central agenda item for discussion. While fully

sympathetic to and supportive of the U.S on the issue of terrorism, the Asia-Pacific countries did not, however, extend the same priority to this issue as the U.S. Their priorities were largely economic. This difference in mutual perceptions created a gap in the level of understanding between the U.S and the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, the U.S interest in multilateralism on the issues of security in the Asia-Pacific as exemplified by the U.S encouragement for setting up of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) seemed to wane. In the nineties, in the setting up of the ARF the utility of multi-polarity in a security architecture in the Asia-Pacific seemed to have been accepted. With the apparent U.S preference for 'unilateralism' especially in the context of the Iraq war, the newly started multilateral approach to security and peace issues in the Asia-Pacific also lagged behind. Non-attendance at the ARF annual meetings by the U.S Secretary of State was seen as an indication to that effect. With the removal of the North Korea issue from the ARF agenda to Six Party Talks the ARF's marginalization was complete. ASEAN which had prided itself for being in the 'driver's seat' of this unique multilateral forum (it has representation of all nuclear powers of the world) accordingly felt downplayed in terms of the U.S priorities. China, on the other hand, emphasized the ARF role in maintenance of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific.

Moreover, Southeast Asian states, especially Thailand and Indonesia which had suffered a great deal during the financial crisis of 1997-98 also could not fully put behind the delayed and not-so-helpful U.S response(the International Monetary Fund had come up with stringent measures at that time) as compared to the Chinese decision not to devalue its yuan which was seen by SE Asia and Korea as major relief. The above situation where the U.S did not project leadership did lead to create a power vacuum in the region which China quietly prepared itself to fill. Even though China lacked in resources comparable to the U.S or Japan it was nevertheless ready strategically to avail of the opportunity.

Already the U.S military intervention in Iraq created a sharp negative reaction among the Muslim majority states, Indonesia and Malaysia. The war in Afghanistan and a series of terrorist incidents such as the Bali and Jakarta bombings in 2002 and 2003 brought the latter face to face with the Al-Qaeda sponsored terrorism. The threat faced from a regional terrorist organization, Jemaah Islamiyah was a very serious one and spread across the large archipelagic state of Indonesia, and Singapore and Malaysia. The situation in southern Thailand which took a sharp turn towards a violent Muslim insurgency in early 2004 created yet one more area of terrorist disturbance in the otherwise peaceful Southeast Asia.

The approach adopted by the states of Southeast Asia seemed consistent with their socio-cultural tradition. They had seen that the U.S global campaign against terrorism and the war in Afghanistan had not substantially helped reduce Islamic fundamentalism and terrorist violence in their countries. In fact, that had elicited a sharp anti- American backlash, for example in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. While ASEAN countries entered into anti-terrorism conventions and agreed on information and intelligence sharing with the Western states as well as India and others, domestically they, and particularly, Indonesia, a country which suffered most severely from terrorism, did not go in for very harsh anti-terrorist laws. The preference was to reaffirm and ensure a broad consensus on the basic tenets of Pancasila(the Indonesian form of religious tolerance) within the society through socio-economic development and dialogue. Southeast Asia was evidently looking for its own solution to the menace of terrorism . Indonesia and Malaysia also opposed the Regional Maritime Security Initiative mooted in 2004 by the U.S in the Malacca Straits to deal with terrorism, piracy and trans-national crime. It should be added here that the Indonesian attitude to the U.S , has undergone a change after its experience in the wake of the Tsunami tragedy in December 2004 and also the settlement in Aceh where the U.S through the timely dispatch of

naval carriers and large financial assistance provided massive support .

In India, the U.S war in Iraq did not create reverberations though there was deep concern that deployment of the huge military force had come close to the Indian shores. The induction of the NATO into neighboring Afghanistan was also disquieting for India . However, that was seen as a useful multilateral effort to deal with Al-Qaeda which continues to pose a major threat to India. Indeed, for India the threat of global terrorism spurred by Islamic radicalism was so substantial and persistent that the reaction in India, both at the official as well as common people's level to the American military intervention was rather mute. This was in sharp contrast to the situations in the past when the U.S used to be the common target of stringent criticism for its interference or intervention in India's neighborhood or Asia in general.

Iran and its nuclear policy has in the meantime become an issue of concern to the U.S and the Asia-Pacific region. Iran's violation of the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and reports of its program of nuclear weapon production has put Iran's relations with the U.S on a confrontational path. This issue has also placed the U.S and western countries on the opposite side of Russia and China. India regards any deterioration of Iran-U.S relations a dangerous situation for the Indian Ocean region and the Asia-Pacific in general. India had voted for the Western sponsored resolution in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in September 2005 on Iran's nuclear question. However, India had also made it clear that a condemnatory approach vis-à-vis Iran was not desirable . Iran was a key regional player and its association with issues of security and stability in the Indian Ocean was therefore essential. India's contacts with Iran are civilizational. India has the second largest shia population after Iran. Moreover, with Iran bordering Pakistan, India also has strategic interests in Iran. Iran's President Ahmadinejad paid a brief visit to India on 29 April 2008. 'From India's point of view, the more engagement there is, the more Iran becomes a factor of stability in the region'

The New York Times of 30 April , 2008 had quoted a senior Indian official about the visit. Today India and Iran are also linked through extensive economic, energy and commercial ties. The proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline is an example of mutual dependence which the three parties are keen on pursuing. In this proposal, India points to its vital needs of natural gas from Iran, the second largest source in the world .At the present time of high energy prices, India would possibly look for every possible source. For Iran, the large Indian market is a major attraction and for Pakistan the revenue from transit fees would be welcome. Obviously, in a project involving these three countries with their past record of mutual relationship and also the overall politico-security climate in the region, success may not be easy. But if it could go through, it can become an unusual instance of economics prevailing over politics.

India's Tryst with Asia-Pacific destiny

India is in the midst of a new international experience. Its economic rise, skills in new technologies like IT, financial services, pharmaceutical technology etc, its nuclear status and its long-standing political and democratic institutional stability is lending it a new voice in the world. Against the background of terrorist violence and political instability in Afghanistan, Pakistan and much of rest of South Asia this acquires significance.

Besides there are a number of issues of global dimension on which consultation, co-ordination and possible cooperation between the West and India is increasingly felt essential. They include : Energy security, Climate change, nuclear energy, maritime security, U.N reforms including Security Council expansion , global trade and WTO negotiations, international finance questions etc.

On the critical issues of political stability and security, India and major Asia-Pacific countries increasingly find that they have common stakes and concerns. Be it the volatile situation in

Afghanistan(where a suicide bombing incident killed 40 persons at the Indian Embassy in July 2008) and the Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas or Myanmar where a deadly storm killed over a hundred thousand people or religious fundamentalism and attendant violence in Southeast Asia.

India's entry on the geopolitical scene of the Asia-Pacific is actually not new. Soon after India's independence when much of Southeast Asia was still under colonial rule India had strongly taken up their cause for freedom. As early as March 1947 India had arranged an Asian Relations Conference where the concept of Asian unity and solidarity was voiced by representatives from all across Asia. India contributed substantially before and after the Korean War for peaceful resolution of the issues on the Korean Peninsula. In India's foreign policy formulation itself there was considerable input of the vision of integration of Asia. If the Cold War limited India's participation on the main issues concerning the Asia-Pacific, India quickly reviewed its policies to intensively start 'looking east' and adapted itself to the changing realities of the region. With all major powers of the Asia-Pacific it has followed a dynamic approach of developing close relations. 'India's leaders are wisely establishing good relations ('strategic partnerships') with all the big powers and not disillusioning any who want to believe that they are special than the others.....Both the Indian and the Chinese are playing the geopolitical game with far more finesse than their American and Japanese counterparts.'¹³ The U.S preponderance after the demise of the Soviet Union or China's phenomenal rise since the early 90's were formidable challenges to India, particularly because during the Cold war period , India had often found itself on the opposite side of these two powers.

India has opted for a policy course which is not too dissimilar to China's 'peaceful rise 'approach. In the case of India, this course is not different from what it had pursued throughout since its independence .With its neighbors in south Asia, the policy of greater bilateral understanding , non-interference and constructive engagement seems to have created better atmospherics –something

which will make them accept India's rise without fears or strong reservation. Central to this policy has been the peace process with Pakistan in the face of severe provocation such as the Kargil intrusion in 1999, the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 in which there were serious apprehensions of Pakistani involvement, a series of terrorist attacks in different cities of India etc. Around India, the security situation remains highly volatile and fragile. Within Pakistan and on the Pak- Afghan border the Al-Qaeda and Taliban have waged a continuous terrorist campaign. In Bangladesh the military have taken power and democratic process has been kept on hold. In Sri Lanka the ethnic conflict has intensified leading to greater violence and bloodshed. In Nepal the Maoist-led government after abolishing the monarchy is still struggling to find normalcy.

The overall politico- security environment in South Asia would also revolve around India's stability and its mature handling of the situation with its neighbors. India's emergence as a regional or global player would depend upon its ability to maintain a generally progressive and peaceful climate within South Asia. Moreover , India's approach to its relations with its extended neighborhood in Southeast Asia, West Asia and the Persian Gulf, and Central Asia would constitute a building block for the great power status that India could aspire for.

India's deepening engagement with east Asia , both at the bilateral as well as regional level, reinforces each other. Several reasons can be attributed to the marked change in India's policy approach. The end of the Cold War , improvement of relations with ASEAN countries and equally importantly with the United States created a new climate for India in the Asia-Pacific. China's rise and its growing relationship with Southeast Asia no doubt also acted as a driving force for India to 'catch up' with the Asia-Pacific region, long neglected by New Delhi. India's desire to expand its diplomatic space beyond South Asia too prompted India to respond

to ASEAN's invitation to join the dialogue with the latter as also become a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). In the past 15 years or so there has been a remarkable transformation in India's relationship with all major players in the Asia-Pacific. Relations between India and the U.S , India and China , India and Japan, and India and Southeast Asia have improved and continue to widen and deepen. How they contribute to India's place in the region can be seen by briefly going into India's relations with the individual powers.

India and the U.S --- A New Era in Relationship

Since the time of the Clinton administration , especially the second term there has been a growing dialogue with India. Nuclear tests by India in 1998 created sharp differences and a hiatus in mutual understanding. However, this was soon overcome with an extensive diplomatic engagement on the sensitive nuclear issue. President Clinton's visit in 2000 further signaled America's growing interest in India. There was bipartisan outlook as regards relations with India with the Republican administration under President Bush taking equally positive view of India. Even though Pakistan became a frontline partner of the U.S in the war against terror, India's importance as a bastion against terrorism was well recognized. India as the largest democracy and a major market acquired greater recognition. The defense cooperation agreement signed between the U.S and India in 2005 was a significant development in the bilateral relations considering the fact that till only a few years ago India was under sanctions regime with the U.S with practically no defense or sensitive items permitted for export to India. According to the newspaper reports, during Defense Secretary Gates' visit to India in February, 2008 'beyond the economic benefits of Indian military modernization, American officials contended that India could be an important stabilizing force in Asia and a counterweight to China's ambitions.'¹⁴ 'That

an informal Indo-U.S alignment is in progress hardly is in doubt. Comments Asad-ul Iqbal Latif comments his perceptive book 'Between Rising Powers: China, Singapore and India' 'Given the potential for Sino-American discord over Taiwan, human rights and China's place in the international order , it made sense for Washington to help New Delhi become South Asia's 'regional security manager', and to acquire the capabilities needed to counterbalance China in the wider Asian region..' ¹⁵ During his visit to Delhi in February, 2008 Mr Gates denied that the Bush administration's effort to strengthen ties to India and other nations was planned specifically with China in mind.' ¹⁶

The nuclear energy deal is presently the main issue between the U.S and India. President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh entered into a landmark agreement on this matter in March 2006 during President Bush's visit to India. The fate of this deal has hung in balance for more than two years. In July 2008 the Indian government has finally gone to the International Atomic Energy Agency to get the approval of the IAEA Board of Governors to the draft India-specific agreement. This has led to the Left parties in India to withdraw their support to the present United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in India. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is however confident of obtaining the support from other political parties in the Indian Parliament necessary for the government's survival. In Japan he had conveyed to President Bush and other G-8 leaders India's commitment and resolve on the nuclear deal. It is now expected in India that the U.S administration would get the necessary approvals at the IAEA, the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and finally in the U.S Congress before the term of the present administration.

Never before in independent India's history has a foreign policy issue created so much political controversy and upheaval as the Indo-U.S nuclear deal. This also shows how deeply and how quickly India is now integrated in the global politico-economic system. In a way this whole negotiation symbolizes the coming of age of India on the world scene where the most powerful country is

anxiously seeking India's partnership in a sensitive and controversial field such as nuclear energy. The agreement, if and when operationalized would end India's nuclear isolation and enable India to receive much needed fuel to run its nuclear energy program. India plans to expand the share of nuclear power to nearly 10 % by 2020 which currently stands at only 3%. For both India and the U.S the deal will signal a new strategic partnership and highly substantial political gains. India will then join the mainstream of nuclear powers (even though formally it will not be declared a nuclear weapon state under the Non-Proliferation Treaty(NPT)) with attendant benefits and obligations. The Indo-U.S nuclear agreement should no doubt be a strategic plus for India in its interaction with countries of the Asia-Pacific and major global powers.

Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice has described the improvement in India-U.S relations as a 'historic transformation' with a 'rising democratic power and termed it among the key strategic accomplishments of the Bush administration which will enable Washington to advance its interests and values in the region as a whole.¹⁷ Indian leaders also reciprocate the sentiment. How will the newly emerging Indo-U.S relationship be factored in the Asia-Pacific?

It is important that the U.S begins to regard India, the most stable and largest democracy in Asia, as a natural partner. For the U.S, the expedient policies of the last five decades in Pakistan and in support to other authoritarian regimes elsewhere in Asia may have done more harm than containing destabilization. In spite of the huge infusion of arms and funds by the U.S and NATO powers in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the past 7 years ,the terrorist threat and eventual rise of the Islamic fundamentalists in these states has not diminished. India's emergence as a major and responsible power , on the other hand will have a benign and sobering effect on the region and globally.

So far India has had a limited presence in the western Pacific though of late, visits and joint exercises by the Indian navy with

countries of the Asia-Pacific have increased. In this context, the U.S and India joint naval activities , be it during the Operation Enduring Freedom in 2002 when Indian naval vessels provided escort to the high value assets of the U.S in the Malacca Straits against possible terrorist attacks or the Malabar exercises in the Bay of Bengal in September 2007 along with the navies of Japan, Australia and Singapore assume importance. The Indian navy also rendered valuable assistance to Indonesia and Thailand following the tsunami disaster in December 2004 and the cyclone tragedy in Myanmar in May 2008. It can play a cooperative role in safeguarding the sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Straits and beyond in the South China Sea to ensure oil transportation security which is vital for all the countries of East Asia.

For the U.S , India's position and role in the Asia-Pacific should not be seen as only supplementary in nature. India , given its own improved relations with most countries of East and Southeast Asia sees its presence in the Asia-Pacific in terms of sharing of common interests with these countries. India would not accept acting on behalf of any other power including the United States in the region. On the hand ,India's overall approach complements the U.S interests with regard to issues such as terrorism, trans-national crime , maritime security including piracy, disaster relief, pandemics etc. In advising the next U.S administration on policy options to East Asia , Prof Gerald L. Curtis of Columbia University says, ' Even though bilateral security arrangements , the hub and spokes approach, still form the core of the U.S strategy in this region, the U.S has to think not only bilaterally but more in trilateral , multilateral and regional terms.'¹⁸ In such approach, India can become a key player in the Asia-Pacific if the U.S bilateral relations with any of the major players were to be strained for some reason. For example, if a serious situation were to occur in the Taiwan Straits or if on the North Korea nuclear issue, the U.S-South Korea or the U.S-Japan relations came under pressure.

Clearly, the backdrop of the present improved state of relations with the U.S should help India to further build its relations with major Asia-Pacific countries some of which are either the U.S allies or are closely linked to the U.S. India has been able to develop a 'security convergence' with a number of Southeast Asian countries in recent years¹⁹ in which again there was a useful input of its better understanding with the U.S. For the U.S and India there is a good opportunity to develop partnership in the Asia-Pacific which will be mutually beneficial. China should not see such a partnership threatening its interests since India is itself keen on building closer ties with China and the ASEAN's response to any Sino-Indian rivalry in their region is to find enough leverage from both and 'be acceptable to all major powers as the 'driver' of the larger regional processes.²⁰

China-India relations : How will they influence Asia-Pacific stability and security?

For sustaining peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific, the states of the region are trying to find innovative approaches, not necessarily at variance with that of the U.S policy but not always in conformity with the U.S views. It is in this context it will be important to examine what influence the China-India relations could have on the matrix of the Asia-pacific (where the U.S is by far the key player) since these large states have the potential to produce a constructive and beneficial climate in the region from which all others can draw advantage of . Alternatively, they can also get involved in a race for military and political superiority with disastrous consequences not only for themselves ,but far beyond in the Asia-Pacific region.

It would be of interest to see what impact civilizational values and culture can make on inter-state relations. India and China have influenced religious thinking ,socio-cultural traditions and practices of East and Southeast Asia for millennia.

Globalization which was witnessed in Asia for more than two thousand years was channelized between China and India. Countries of the Asia-Pacific were active players in the global trade and commercial exchanges. Western colonialism brought a halt to that ancient practice. As late as 1820, China and India together constituted for nearly 50% of global GDP. However, today their roles are being restored. On the other hand, old prejudices and rivalries are not over. Hegemonic attitude of large powers to their small neighbors finds expression from time to time. China's past record with the countries of Southeast Asia is replete with accounts of military expeditions for extracting tribute. India, has a different past with this region. As a renowned French scholar G. Coedes notes in his classic 'The Indianized States of Southeast Asia' 'Indians were 'nowhere engaged in military conquest and annexation in the name of a state or mother country.'²¹ Between China and India, importantly, there was peace over a long stretch of history. It is not the past that created a shadow but the more recent situation of the Chinese attack on India in 1962. The two have, however, taken several constructive steps to build a mutually beneficial relationship and confidence since the historic meeting between Rajiv Gandhi and Deng Xiao Ping in 1988. The multi-faceted relationship that exists now should militate against any probability that the two sides would allow their existing differences to aggravate to an open conflict. It is nevertheless important to consider how China would deal with India on strategic issues on which its views may not coincide with India's or differ sharply from that of India.

It is commented by geopolitical analysts in the West that India takes a very assertive posture toward China while China pays so little attention to India that the subject doesn't arise in most foreign policy or security discussions.²² This could perhaps be true. For India may rank low in terms of China's strategic priorities in comparison to its relationship with the U.S or Japan. However, of late, the attention that the U.S is paying to India,

especially on the India-U.S nuclear deal , appears to prompt China to consider India in a different vein.

For China, security in the western Pacific is of utmost concern. This includes issues such as the relationship with Japan, especially in the context of the Japan-U.S security alliance and cross-Strait questions with Taiwan. India appears quite far from these key areas. However, it may be pointed out that there are also issues which China finds quite pressing in which India can be a factor, directly or indirectly. That includes the status of Tibet and the attitude of Tibetans to China; relations and influence with Myanmar ; Islamic fundamentalism and threats of terrorism. During the Tibet crisis that broke out in March 2008 in Lhasa and spread all around the world even as the Olympic torch procession conducted by China met with strong Tibetan and other nationalities' protests in cities as diverse as Paris, London , San Francisco or New Delhi, India did not seek to exploit the Chinese vulnerability . India has always held the position that Dalai Lama and Tibetan refugees would stay in India on humanitarian grounds as long as their activities were not detrimental to India's relations with China. India had made its decision about Tibet's sovereignty long ago and there has been no shift even though during the recent Tibetan unrest some political elements in India called for a change in the Indian position. While reaffirming the stand that India regarded Tibet as an autonomous region of China , it expressed concern over the violence in Tibet and called for a dialogue between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government. The Olympic torch procession in Delhi on 17 April passed without any major incident thanks to the very extensive precautions taken by the Indian government. That India handled the whole issue with great restraint and maturity was of much help to China. India's future position on this issue can be of consequence not only bilaterally but also in the larger regional or global context.

The issue of Islamic fundamentalism in Xinjiang in northwest China where a separatist East Turkestan movement has been active for past several years can also have a bearing on

China's outlook on the question of terrorism and this could feed into China's policy to Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. China's leadership role in the newly constituted Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can be seen to be connected to its concerns of security against growing Islamic radicalism in its own northwest province as also its neighborhood. Russia and Central Asian states share the Chinese concern over this as does India which has been granted the Observer status at the SCO. The Russia-China-India annual triologue at the Foreign Ministers level which has taken place regularly since 2004 has also focused on the issue of terrorism.

As stated above, India-China relations have seen considerable improvement in recent years. Highest level visits between the two have become a regular feature. An India-China Strategic and Co-operative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity was agreed upon in 2003. During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to China in January 2008, China gave 'positive' signs on the Indo-U.S civilian nuclear deal.²³ At the meeting with the Chinese President on the sidelines of the G-8 in Japan, Prime Minister Singh was reported to have received similar indication. What position China finally adopts in the IAEA on the India-specific agreement and in the Nuclear Supply Group would no doubt be carefully seen in India and could influence the Indian perception of China. In economic and commercial exchanges, the trade volumes have gone up dramatically. (from a two-way trade of \$300 million in 1994 to \$40 billion in 2007) China is poised to become India's largest trading partner in a year or two. Investments are taking place from both sides including in areas of high technology and infrastructure. The two sides are even engaged in studying the possibility of a Free Trade Agreement. China has become a major motivating factor for the Indian industry and business and competitiveness with China as the watchword. At the same time, economists and experts are engaged in comparing the two experiences, the two stories, some of them finding the economic dynamism of these emerging economies a source of

great help to entrepreneurs from around the world. As Prof. Tarun Khanna of Harvard University writes in his book, 'Billions of Entrepreneurs-How China and India are reshaping their Futures and Yours', 'The real issue is that the differences between the two have created a jointness in new riches to be enjoyed by the two countries and by those anywhere in the world who come to profit from their advent.....There is renewed hope in China and India as they experience success in dealing with the world and put aside their mutual hostilities toward one another in favor of collaborations. There is hope too in the pioneering western entrepreneurs who prefer to share in China and India's recent gains rather than attempt to derail, with misguided protectionism, the emergence of these two giants on the world stage.'

In the meanwhile, the longstanding and complex boundary dispute between India and China remains unresolved. Despite the appointment of high level political representatives on both sides and several rounds of talks over past five years, the issue still seems to defy solution. If anything, in the past couple of years the Chinese have come up with new demands . Just a week before the state visit of the Chinese President Hu Jintao to India in November 2006, the Chinese Ambassador in New Delhi pressed China's claim for Arunachal Pradesh in India's northeast . The Chinese have called for transfer of the land where the well-known Tawang monastery in Arunachal Pradesh is located. The Chinese went to the extent of lodging a protest on India's Prime Minister's visit to Arunachal Pradesh in March, 2008. India rejected the protest and has conveyed to the Chinese side that Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India.²⁴ India had complained about Chinese incursions in Arunachal Pradesh and the Chinese troops amassment on the western side of Bhutanese border close to the India-China-Bhutan tri-junction. The Chinese, on the other hand, protested about Indian army movements across the Sikkim border.²⁵ Such instances only raise the question as to how China would continue to handle the border dispute given the fact that a

clear understanding had been reached between India and China that the issue would remain under high level discussion while relations in all other fields, especially trade and economic cooperation expanded exponentially.

The recent unrest in Tibet would expectedly put the Chinese attention more focused on the situation in Tibet and Dalai Lama and Tibetan refugees living in India. Moreover, with the cross-Straits relations likely to be less tense than in the recent years due to the new Taiwanese President's position calling for warmer ties with Beijing, China may now shift its attention to areas such as the border with India. China could also point out that most of its land boundary issues except with India have been settled. Any escalation of the issue, even accidentally, resulting in a military conflict would, be a major loss both for China and India who are following a well-thought out foreign policy of sustaining peaceful relations with their respective neighbors. It would rip open the current peace and dialogue atmosphere in Asia. Years of effort in this direction would go down the drain as also the progress China and India have achieved in economic development and poverty alleviation.

As stated earlier, the impact of Sino-Indian relationship on the overall scene of the Asia-Pacific in the coming years would be significant. Their search for energy resources or strategies to win friends in their extended neighborhoods will inexorably create a sense of rivalry. Already China has acquired a dominant position in trade and investment not only in Southeast Asian countries but also in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka – India's immediate neighbors in South Asia. China is also engaged in establishing a chain of 'pearls of security' in the Indian Ocean. For example, the Gwadar port in Pakistan, Chittagong in Bangladesh, Sittwe, Coco, Hanggyi in Myanmar. India has expressed its concern over this development which it regards has serious strategic implications for India.²⁶ On the other hand, India is seen to be active in establishing defense ties with Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam. It is undertaking joint naval exercises with

Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia. The Malabar exercise in September 2007 between the U.S, Japan, Australia , Singapore and the Indian naval forces in the Bay of Bengal is another example of growing defense cooperation among these countries . China expressed its discomfort at such activities which it believed was China-centric.

China-India competition need not be viewed as a zero-sum game. Historically, there is no evidence that these two large civilizations clashed to promote their interests. Quite to the contrary. They generally lived side by side , traded extensively and flourished economically. Southeast Asia has always found the two as balancing forces for each other. Today Southeast Asia needs both and is trying to work out cooperative arrangements on multilateral lines. It seems that Southeast Asia has already assessed how the weight of China and India should be used for the stability of East Asia region. On the Asia-Pacific scene, the two can be primary building blocks for security and peace.

India-Japan relations- Bridging the gap!

The state of relationship between Japan and India can be described as a puzzle. Despite sharing so much in common- enormous mutual goodwill and respect for each other, Buddhist heritage, democracy, Asian traditions and so on- the two Asia-Pacific giants have had at best a marginal relationship. In recent years even that went to a low bottom after India's nuclear tests. However, subsequent dialogues at various levels have created new interest and seen rapid improvement in relations. Today the two have entered into a 'global strategic partnership', are members of the East Asia Summit(EAS) and together work towards fulfilling their aspiration for Permanent Membership of the U.N. Security Council. Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his speech ' Confluence of the two Seas' to the Indian Parliament on 22 August 2007 had said ; ' The Pacific and the Indian Oceans are

now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and prosperity. A 'broader Asia' that broke away geographical boundaries is now beginning to take a distinct form.....By Japan and India coming together in this way, this 'broader Asia' will evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean.' and asked if it was not incumbent upon two democracies Japan and India to carry out the pursuit of freedom and prosperity in the region? ²⁷ The present Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda 'imagines a developing Asia to be 'forming a network of countries with such nations as the United States, Russia and India'.²⁸ Indeed, as Ambassador Hirabayashi, President of the Japan-India Association and former Ambassador to India states , 'India is destined to become a player of exceptional importance in the international community . In the Asian theater in particular, where numerous elements of insecurity persist, it is expected to become a guarantor of peace and stability. This will become more effective if India strengthens its partnership with India, an increasingly proactive contributor to this end.'²⁹

The above expressions of Japanese leaders with regard to interest in and expectation from India are positive and welcoming to India. In India , too, there is realization that Japan is a highly valued partner for India and in the context of India's place in the Asia-Pacific and globally , a crucial factor. Again, improvement in the Indo-U.S relations has come at a right time even as India and Japan take a closer view of each other. For Japan, China is a primary pre-occupation even though under Prime Minister Abe and now Fukuda exchanges at highest level have grown and a 'framework for cooperative relations has been drawn up.' The visit of a Japanese naval warship to China in June 2008 is seen as part of a broad and gradual reconciliation between the two countries, the pace of which has quickened since a visit to Japan by President Hu Jintao of China in May 2008.³⁰

The rise of China can be seen as the main reason why Japan's orientation to India has changed in recent years. ' While Japan balances China with India, it also band wagons with the United

States against China. This strategic thinking has led to a much higher level of government -to-government contact between Japan and India extending even to defense and security matters. These are still early days in development of more formal , possibly more comprehensive , security arrangements between Japan and India bilaterally and multilaterally, particularly in collaboration with the U.S and Australia. But it is clear that both Japan and India intend that recent moves in this direction signal to other nations their mutual interest in establishing a more comprehensive arrangement that will reshape understandings of the evolving security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region.’³¹

There is no doubt that while India-Japan relations are now poised to grow deeper and faster, there is a host of factors that will determine this growth and not least among them will be the domestic ones especially in Japan. An assertive, outward looking Japan will look for expanding ties beyond its immediate neighborhood. In such policy framework which will also see a spurt in nationalism there will be greater push to building relations with India . Japan’s participation in the Iraq war had also increased its interest in the Indian Ocean region. Japan under P.M Abe was looking for ‘an arc of prosperity’, a ‘new Asian order’ and a coalition of democracies, based on values that would bring together Japan with India, Australia and the U.S. ‘ Such alliance formation is striking because it was led by rising Asian powers rather than the U.S. It is also striking because this new Asian order seeks to replicate the democratic peace of the west.’³² Besides, Japan also sought closer ties with Korea. That would provide Japan autonomy in dealing with China and the U.S. However, a more cautious view still widely taken in Japan calls for a continued adherence to the Yoshida framework of the Peace Constitution and the U.S –Japan alliance as the principal pillars of the Japanese foreign policy even though this alliance might have constrained Japan’s other foreign policy options especially dealing with China. P.M Ikeda put economic content in this framework as a result of which Japan became an economic superpower. In line with this

thinking Japan still seems to believe itself to be a middle power comparable to Korea or Australia and thus in no position to compete against China . Accordingly, it also considers China as a pre-eminent power at the center of Asia's stability and overall growth.

Japan's view of itself thus casts impact on the Asia-Pacific scene. India's projection of interest in the region would also get influenced by this Japanese view. If Japan worked towards becoming a 'normal' nation and assumed an assertive policy by 'envisaging the Fukuda Doctrine for the next 30 years in imagining Asia to be a network of countries and the Pacific Ocean as' an island sea'³³ it would possibly embrace India as a major democracy and regard the relationship with India as a component in its approach to forming an 'arc of prosperity' or 'league of democracy'. If however, Japan accepted China's pre-eminence then it might not feel the need to build closer relations with India. How does the internal policy dynamic evolve in Japan ,especially when China-Japan relations are on the mend could perhaps influence the Japanese outlook to India. On the other hand, in India, too, its relations with Japan have been primarily measured in economic terms- Japanese official aid, investment, technology transfer etc. India has been one of the largest recipients of the Japanese official development assistance(ODA).No doubt India's IT sector is expanding in Japan and given the expansion of India's middle class the potential Indian market for Japanese goods should be more attractive. Yet the economic yardstick is not fully adequate to build the relationship. Besides, India's own relations with China, particularly in the economic and commercial field are growing rapidly. For long India felt uncertain whether Japan would be serious in coming forward to develop closer relations. That stage has fortunately passed. Both India and Japan would need to take initiatives and make sustained efforts to reassure each other of serious interest in building the relationship which will act as an anchor for the stability and peace of the Asia-Pacific.

The Korean Peninsula—

India was closely associated with this strategically important region of the Asia-Pacific before and during the Korean war. An Indian representative played a crucial role in the U.N. referendum on the two Koreas. India had sent humanitarian assistance during the Korean War and was Chairman of the Neutral Nations' Repatriation Commission when the War ended.

Today India's relations with Republic of Korea are deep and extensive. With North Korea, though a non-aligned country, the dialogue has been marginal especially since the time of the North Korea-Pakistan-China exchanges on nuclear weapon and space technology.

In the meanwhile, South Korea has emerged as a major partner of India in industrial and economic cooperation. Today it is one of the largest investors in India. Be it steel, consumer electronics and white goods, cars or ships, the South Korean presence in India is ubiquitous and impressive. On the Indian side, its services sector especially in IT, pharmaceuticals etc is making a mark in South Korea. The two sides are considering a free trade agreement. Even though India is not a comparable economic partner for South Korea as China, Japan or even Southeast Asia are today, the rapidly developing India-South Korea relationship marks an important component in the process towards India's integration in the East Asian economy and thus towards an eventual Asian Economic Community.

India-Russia relations in the Asia-Pacific: A Marginal Exercise so far!

As a superpower, the former Soviet Union had extensive strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific. Its naval bases in Vladivostok and Nakhodka, close relations with North Korea and Vietnam including the naval base in Cam Ranh bay signified a major presence. After the end of the Cold War the picture has

substantially changed. With the withdrawal from the Cam Ranh bay ,its successor state, Russia has no naval base anywhere in Southeast Asia. Following the demarcation of the Russia-China boundary and extensive commercial exchanges between China and Russia with the latter emerging as the principal source of sophisticated military equipment the strategic picture of the western Pacific has undergone a major transformation. Today it is not Russia but China which is the principal power in the region(after the U.S.).In the Shanghai Cooperation Organization(SCO) which Russia, China and Central Asian states set up a few years ago to deal with security issues Russia's main interest appears to deal with the threat of religious fundamentalism in its erstwhile republics in Central Asia. In the Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear issue, Russia is also a member even though China seems to have major influence on North Korea. Russia of course has in the recent years made enormous strides as the leading energy producer with its eastern regions of Siberia and the Sakhalin islands emerging as the principal sources of oil and gas. In that context the strategic value of the Far East for Russia which otherwise appears more Euro-centric is enormous.

For India which has had a close and time-tested relationship with the former Soviet Union has to assess how their bilateral relations can develop in the Asia-Pacific and how they can contribute to the overall stability of the region which is so important to both. India has joined the SCO as an observer. As mentioned in the foregoing, India, China and Russia have also a trilateral arrangement in which Foreign Ministers regularly meet for consultations on major regional and international issues. As a principal supplier of military equipment including naval vessels Russia's Pacific coast including the port of Vladivostok bears importance to India. India's Oil and Natural Gas Commission also has a share in the Sakhalin I project on oil and gas. Russian energy sources on the Pacific coast offer India promising possibilities to meet its oil demand.

In the power play in the Asia-Pacific Russia seems lagging behind other major players like the U.S, China or Japan. Even though Russia is a member of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)(to check) and ARF, it is not still fully associated with the ASEAN dialogue mechanism nor is invited so far to be a member of the newly created East Asia Summit. Russia's economic linkages with Southeast Asia remain limited. Even with Vietnam , its erstwhile ally , the relations particularly economic are relatively small. With Malaysia and Indonesia , there have been purchases of a few advanced Sukhoi aircraft ; but overall cooperation is limited. Russia's ties with Southeast Asia are not likely to expand substantially if the private sector from Russia is not engaged more in this region. India has gone through a similar experience and now sees the advantage of full-fledged involvement of the private sector on both sides.

Southeast Asia: Core of India's 'Look East' policy

It can be said that in India's engagement with East Asia , the countries of Southeast Asia have played an important role, both bilaterally as well as through their regional organization ASEAN. Since the end of the Cold War, they had recognized the need to overcome the differences and distance that had developed with India. On its part, India was looking for ways to re-establish the equation which India and Southeast Asia had enjoyed in the past. The positive resonance which India received from SE Asia enabled India to combine politico-security and economic initiatives into a concrete form . It was this successful experience in its policy with Southeast Asia for over a decade that gave India a new confidence even in its dealings with other regions of the world. India and Southeast Asian countries are now engaged in an active dialogue and a substantial expansion in their political, defense, economic or cultural relations. India and ASEAN countries meet in a summit every year, India is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum

(ARF) and since 2005 India has joined the East Asia Summit, a grouping of ten ASEAN states, and China, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand. The diplomatic advantages of the widening of India's engagement with East Asia are extensive. India is no more confined to South Asia but is also beginning to find a role for itself in the western Pacific where major Asia-Pacific powers –the U.S, China, Japan and Russia are directly involved. India's strategic interests being overlapping in the Indian and Pacific Oceans , extending from the Persian Gulf or Aden to the South China Sea through the Straits of Malacca it was but necessary that India attached full attention to its relations with the East. An Indian strategist , Sardar K.M. Panikkar had written in his book 'The Future of Southeast Asia: An Indian View' as far back in 1943 that India and Southeast Asia needed to work out a 'co-prosperity sphere' based on their interdependence and mentioned the need for a 'common defense system'.³⁴ For Southeast Asia, too, improved and vibrant relations with India provided a useful opportunity to find a balance with China which was rapidly expanding its relations in East Asia, especially Southeast Asia. The latter have a historic tradition of bringing together the two large neighbors on a common platform to enable to find them their own niche without conflict. Today , Southeast Asia is seeking to perform similar role . The organization ASEAN which has completed 40 years of existence has now come of age with its own Charter and a well-defined program of creating a Security, Economic and Social Community in Southeast Asia in a decade's time. While doing so, ASEAN is working to maximize interaction with its partners such as the U.S., China, Japan and India. Between India and Southeast Asian countries there has developed a close identity and understanding in which comprehensive security in terms of political, economic, maritime or cultural cooperation has steadily grown. India and ASEAN are close to concluding a free-trade area and economic cooperation agreement which will open a new era in their relations.

The challenges to India to maintain its relationship with Southeast Asia are many. First and foremost, India needs to continue on the present trajectory of high economic growth and rapid elimination of poverty . India's achievement on this basic question in a democratic way is looked upon with admiration by the democracies of Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia , Thailand and Malaysia . India's own 'soft power' of democracy, cultural affinity with Southeast Asia and the large and dynamic Indian diaspora can play a highly influential role in East Asia . As is well known , the Indian culture has had a civilizational impact on East and Southeast Asia for over a thousand and five hundred years. It is fully assimilated in the culture and traditions of the Asia-Pacific region. The Indian diaspora especially in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia is sizeable and occupies an important place in the local societies. At the same time, India's ability to maintain good and peaceful relations with its neighbors especially China and Pakistan would reflect on its relationship with its extended neighborhood in Southeast and East Asia. Moreover, India's capacity to fulfill the expectations from Southeast Asia especially in the face of China's 'charm offensive'³⁵ , a major Chinese thrust of soft power combined with financial assistance, is crucial. This will be dependent on India's sustained economic growth against the odds of high energy prices and inflationary trend in India. The ASEAN +3 (China, Japan and Korea) grouping has made considerable headway in as many as 18 sectors connected with business, finance etc. The East Asia Summit mechanism, on the other hand, is relatively young (only 3 years old) and still not well structured.

Secondly, the level of the U.S commitment and interest in the region impacts on the region a great deal given the fact that the U.S is a preponderant power. The excellent relations that several Southeast Asian countries have had with the U.S. has been a useful factor to India as well since Indo-U.S relations have seen improvement in recent years. The perception of declining U.S interest in Southeast Asia that has developed during the past few

years, especially since 9/11 has led to the lowering of U.S image in the region.

Yet another constraint is the situation in some of the Southeast Asian countries themselves. Indonesia has become a democracy after a long authoritarian rule; however, it is still fledgling and in the process of consolidating itself facing such difficult challenges as Islamic fundamentalism, separatist insurgencies or vast unemployment. In Thailand the tussle between the military and democratic forces goes on ; and in Malaysia, ethnic issues have come in sharp focus leading to a challenge to the ruling party. In the Philippines , the picture is of continuing uncertainty .

The Myanmar Question

Myanmar is a classic case in which ASEAN finds itself in a helpless and somewhat embarrassing position for not being able to do anything to effect transition to a democracy or even to end the years-long detention of Aung San Suu Kyi , the Nobel laureate pro-democracy leader of Myanmar. For past several years, ASEAN has faced severe criticism especially from the West for not acting with its member state with regard to its human rights violations in Myanmar. In ASEAN itself there have been strong expressions of dissatisfaction over Myanmar's record. The newly adopted Charter of ASEAN has not been ratified so far because the Philippines has refused to agree on account of the Myanmar regime's treatment of Aung San Suu Kyi. Even during the tragedy in May 2008 in which over a hundred thousand people lost their lives in the deadly storm in the Irrawaddy Delta in Myanmar, the regime's delayed action and overall indifferent approach has shown that regardless of the appeal by the international community and personal visit by the United Nations Secretary General, it decided to act on its own terms. ASEAN's efforts to provide assistance to the needy people have also proved to be marginal.

The Myanmar situation has thus become a test for ASEAN even as India also finds itself constrained over this issue. For India, the options for policy on Myanmar seem to be restricted due to its own security concerns as a result of the insurgency situation faced in its northeast. Indian Naga and Manipuri insurgents have operated for years across the porous border stretching over 1600 kms in the inhospitable mountain areas between the two countries . The Myanmar military extends useful support to the Indian forces in dealing with the insurgency. In terms of India's security needs this is vital. Another important consideration for India is the continuing large- scale assistance including in the military field that China provides to Myanmar. With China's help Myanmar has built a series of port facilities on the Bay of Bengal which China can use. In its own way, India is also engaging itself in assisting Myanmar to build infrastructure of roads, railways, ports etc. India(like China) also has interests in natural gas projects off the Rekhine coast of Myanmar. After the recent storm disaster , India was one of the first countries to rush ships to Myanmar with humanitarian assistance.

Myanmar may remain a difficult issue for India in its interaction with the Asia-Pacific powers ; but so it will be for a number of Southeast Asian countries individually as also for the grouping ASEAN as a whole and for the U.S., Japan and others. Clearly, as long as Myanmar counts on China's full support which the latter continues to extend, there is not much prospect of a major change in the Myanmar situation.

Australia : a new player in the offing?

Australia , a close ally of the United States , ' a deputy sheriff ' in the long period of John Howard's Premiership has had a somewhat unclear relationship with the countries of the Asia-Pacific. While increasingly adjusting itself to the geographic fact of its location, Australia had kept up its identity with the West. In recent years its

burgeoning commodity trade with China and the latter's massive investments has put Australia-China relationship in a distinctive position. The new administration of Prime Minister Rudd who seems to enjoy a personal rapport with the Chinese leaders and society as a whole has given a very high priority to its relations with China. The inclusion of Australia in the East Asia Summit gives this country an entry in the regional outlook towards integration gradually progressing in the Asia-Pacific. With its troop withdrawal from Iraq later in 2008, Australia will be seen to be focusing on the issues in its neighborhood.

On India's place in the Asia-Pacific the Australian view seemed to be becoming a little positive in recent years. Both India and Australia are now members of the East Asian Summit. (It is interesting to recall that as far back as 1947 India had invited Australia to the first ever Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi) They participated together with the U.S., Japan and Singapore navies in the Malabar exercises conducted in the Bay of Bengal in September 2007. Bilaterally, too, there is improvement in relations with rapidly growing trade and Indian investment. Yet, Australia remains opposed to supplying uranium to India on the grounds that India is not a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Australia's support to the India-U.S nuclear deal will therefore be crucial when the matter comes before the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) of which Australia is a member. Australia had been a strong critic of India on the latter's nuclear tests in 1998 and at the negotiations on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in the 90s.

What role Australia will play in the Asia-Pacific will largely depend upon what position it forms with regard to its own identity. Whether Australia will fully throw its weight with its geographically adopted region of the Asia-Pacific or continue to maintain its ties primarily attached to the West remains to be seen.

Looking Ahead

Why is India in the East? What strategic or economic interests of India are being served by this approach? Will India be prepared to play a supplementary role to the U.S and in support of the democracies in the region or will it have an independent policy even though it is still not militarily or economically as strong as China? Would India be prepared to play the role of a regional power in Myanmar or Iran ? Does not India's quest for economic integration with East Asia create for India an asymmetric situation in which the major players will be Northeast countries and even some of the Southeast Asian countries? These and similar questions could continue to come to mind even as India's place in the Asia-Pacific in the coming decades begins to take a definite shape.

Since the end of the Cold War , India has adjusted and nuanced its foreign policy to the changing realities of the world. This can be seen prominently in the Asia-Pacific region. Relations with the U.S have dramatically changed. The two are close to a historic deal on the nuclear energy issue, a feat which would have appeared impossible only a few years ago. India is also engaged in deepening and widening relations with a number of countries of the Asia-Pacific with which its ties in the Cold War days were only nominal. In the evolving power configuration, however, India is maintaining an independent policy in keeping with its own non-aligned approach. India's policies to the U.S, China, Japan, Southeast Asia, or Myanmar issue, Iran(the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline), the war in Iraq, or its nuclear policy , stand on WTO negotiations or on Kyoto Protocol related to global warming etc are all articulations of its own interest and vision . India's China policy, be it the border issue, Tibet or on the question of China's support in strategic fields to India's neighbors in South Asia etc is a clear manifestation of its own national interest and thinking. It has no relevance to the U.S –China relations. Equally India does not regard itself as a 'counter-weight' or a 'hedge' against China.

There is also no reason for India to harbor any self-doubt in its engagement with the Asia-Pacific thinking that it is an 'unequal' partner with Northeast Asia. Even though there is asymmetry in respect of overall strength between China and Japan on the one hand and India on the other, it can be seen that the sub-region of Northeast Asia has so far not even started on regionalism. In contrast, Southeast Asia and India have their regional organizations in place and making steady progress, even though South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) might not have been as successful as ASEAN. Moreover, India and ASEAN have also established institutional linkages just as Northeast Asia and ASEAN have and today India is a member state in the EAS along with Japan, China and Korea.

Of course, a major factor for India's profile in the Asia-Pacific would be India's own ability and policy outlook to isolate the issues such as cross-border terrorism, its impact on the situation in Kashmir and resultant tension with Pakistan away from economic progress and social development. The situation within Pakistan and the Afghanistan-Pakistan border continues to be volatile and uncertain. There are press reports that 'Pakistan will not retain or reequip troops to fight the counter-insurgency war the Americans are demanding on Pakistan's mountainous western border. Instead, the bulk of the army will remain deployed on Pakistan's eastern border and prepare for possible conflicts with traditional enemy India'.³⁶ Judged by such reports there could be again amassing of the Pakistan army on the India border, and resultant tension in the bilateral relations. As in the case with Pakistan, so also with other neighbors, Bangladesh, Nepal or Sri Lanka there can be sudden tension due to border issues, illegal immigration or ethnic violence. In the past 16-17 years, India has managed to handle such situations or even more serious provocations through dialogue and peaceful approach. India seems to have made up its mind on a clear policy, which, interestingly, different governments of opposing political ideologies have more or less uniformly followed, of not allowing

its bilateral disputes in South Asia to go out of hand into military conflagration. Such approach is being adopted as a pre-requisite for successful rise of India in Asia and the world at large.

Another thought which comes up in this connection is whether nationalism in India as well as in the countries of the Asia-Pacific might inhibit the trend towards the emergence of the Asian century . India's rise in the Asia-Pacific is also an integral part of this process. In the discussion on the shift of the center of gravity to Asia , it is assumed that Asian powers will rise in harmony, without conflict. This pre-supposes that nationalism will not create competing ambitions or pressures among major powers like China, Japan, Korea, India, Vietnam or Indonesia . While all these countries have adapted themselves to the demands of globalization, they retain their own national traits and traditions. Nationalism continues to define their identity and values. Sharp differences on the issues of history, territorial claims , boundary demarcation, illegal trans-national immigration etc. exist between countries of the region. Yet, the redeeming feature is that despite such disputes and rivalries, Japan and China, Japan and Korea, India and China, Vietnam and China , India and Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia, Singapore and Malaysia have built on-going and fairly substantive bilateral relationships. In most cases, the outstanding disputes are not allowed to come in the way of progress, especially in the economic area. Huge trade , tourism, investments go on between Japan and Korea or China and Japan or India and China. Such pragmatism is a welcome feature of our time which is expected to be the binding factor for the Asian nations in the coming years and decades.

Democracy is a platform on which India and a number of Asia-Pacific countries can share a great deal in common. India's achievement of sustaining a representative democratic governance of over a billion people has no parallel in history. More and more countries in Asia-Pacific are adopting democratic form of government. With consistent high economic growth in recent years India's democracy has now begun to get more recognition and

respectability since it was seen that without economic strength only poverty and under-development were highlighted. Democracy can be India's major 'soft power' in the Asia-Pacific and needs to be deployed sufficiently.

In India's 'push' to the East, there was an underlying quest for economic integration. India does not seem to have any apprehension that in such approach, East Asia, mainly China and Japan will be the principal players. Even ASEAN's trade is larger than that of India. The grounds for India's approach are clear. India's trade with East Asia is nearly 50% of its total trade. Moreover, the idea of an Asian Economic Community is beginning to take shape with strong endorsement from policy makers and academics in JACIK (Japan, ASEAN, China, India and Korea) countries. India has expressed its support to the creation of such Community. In the process of economic integration with East Asia it is also understood that economic reforms in India were, inter alia, spurred by the phenomenal economic progress in China and 'economic tigers' in the region. China's success in infrastructure, foreign direct investment (FDI), Special Economic Zone (SEZs) etc have become benchmarks for India. Through integration, India hopes to benefit not only economically but stands to gain strategically. It does not seem to miss the opportunity which it had in the seventies and eighties.

One critical constraint that India may face in its economic integration with East Asia is energy. India's dependence on energy to the extent of more than 70% can impact on its economic growth. No doubt, China, Japan, Korea also suffer from similar constraint. But in terms of the availability of foreign exchange reserves or their overall exports, they are far better placed than India. The latter would need to invest massively both in natural gas as well as renewable sources of energy.

Speaking about possible geopolitical scenarios in the Asia-Pacific, it has been commented by an American author, William Overholt that 'Indian politics will continue in a business-as-usual fashion, gradual reform will continue to produce 6 to 8 per cent

real GDP growth, and the country will avoid serious warfare. In that scenario, India becomes much more important than it has been, particularly for business, but it does not become a primary determinant of Asia's geopolitical future for the next 15 years unless China falters.³⁷

This assessment broadly reflects the present trend in the Indian political direction and economy. As stated earlier, India's disparate and seemingly fractious politics has consistently over the past 15 years or so preferred stability and order so as to enable the country to progress steadily over 6 % GDP growth (during 2003 to 2008 at 8% and above). India does not appear to seek a contest with China with regard to Asia's geopolitical pre-eminence. India's relationship with the powers in Asia is far different than that of China. India had a benign historical record with most of Asian countries. Today its relations with the U.S., Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia and even China are generally marked by growing understanding and dialogue.

CONCLUSION

With its rapid integration with the world economy and its global requirements, be it energy, trade, investment or technology, India is poised to become a global player in a couple of decades or even earlier. Without such integration, the needs, political and economic, of one billion plus people cannot be met. India is now associated with G-8, Meeting of the Major Economies, BRIC etc. It brings there not only its own concerns and perceptions on such issues as energy, food security, climate change, terrorism, protectionism in international trade etc but those of developing countries in general. India's contribution at a forum like G-8 is that it tries to give a balanced perspective of a large developing economy.

India's rise and its growing involvement in the Asia-Pacific region are two simultaneous developments of strategic significance. Even as India enters the arena, it finds that major power competition in the region is intense. India is still a newcomer and

will inevitably have to navigate the geopolitical waters with care , but also confidence and boldness. The stakes are high, both for India as also other powers. In the new order that is emerging the importance of powers will be determined by their willingness and capacity to assume responsibilities on issues of common concern. How would India , as a key stake-holder bring its political will and strength, military, economic or socio-cultural to bear on the Asia-Pacific chess-board will shape its effectiveness as a player in the complex and highly competitive game played out there.

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End- notes

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