

## Global Views on India and Malaysia

**S**ession One of the Dialogue discussed, among other things, how India and Malaysia assess key strategic and political and economic developments at the international level. The lead speakers were **Amb Sudhir T Devare**, Director General, Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) India, and **Dr Stephen Leong**, Director, Centre for International Studies, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman and Visiting Fellow, ISIS Malaysia. The session was moderated by **Tan Sri Mohamed Jawhar Hassan**, Chairman of ISIS Malaysia. Former ISIS Analyst **Tengku Iskandar** reports.



(From left) Stephen Leong, Mohamed Jawhar and Sudhir T Devare

**Amb Sudhir T Devare** brought into focus three main issues from 2009. These were:

- (1) The new approach in international affairs affecting developments in the region around India with Obama as US president.
- (2) India's recent general elections in May 2009 returned the same political party to power, therefore continuing the same Indian foreign policy, namely, independence of action, commitment to the principle of close relations with neighbours, and reaching out and engaging with major powers.
- (3) The AfPak (Afghanistan-Pakistan) policy in combating extremism, fundamentalism, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in the two

countries. India is of the view that the international community should address the real causes of terrorism in those areas.

India is consulted closely by the US on AfPak policies though it does not decide on these policies, said Devare. India is working towards peace and stability in Afghanistan because it has been a victim of terrorism from that region for a long time. India has also been in dialogue with Pakistan for a long period of time and wants all mutual issues to be addressed. It wants Pakistan to act against terrorist groups attacking India from locations within Pakistan (the latest was the Mumbai attack). India wants Afghanistan's affairs to be decided by its people and not by the Taliban or its proxies; its current government must be given an opportunity to prove itself.

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India is giving Afghanistan US\$1.3 billion worth of aid to help it acquire stability and peace.

India is closely associated with its northern neighbour, Nepal, and the latter's political parties, including the Maoists. With Nepal's new constitution, India is hoping for stability in that nation. As for Sri Lanka, while the defeat and elimination of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is also banned in India, is a positive development, the country must address the humanitarian concerns of the Tamil minority. In the past, there was a risk of the latter's exodus to India.

Finally, the recent visit to India by the Bangladesh Prime Minister, as well as the handing over to India of a number of Bangladesh-based anti-India 'insurgents,' were positive signs of improving relations between the two nations said Devare.

India has offered Bangladesh a loan of US\$1 billion, and the two nations have signed a number of agreements, heralding an era of close relations between them.

### China

Though China's assertiveness has been of concern to India, political dialogue between them has been ongoing for the past seven years. India believes that its complex border issues with China should only be resolved through dialogue. However, said Devare, bilateral trade has exceeded US\$50 billion and China is soon to become India's largest trading partner. They consult each other extensively in international forums.

Devare said that China remains engaged with the Asia-Pacific with its Look East Policy and

it wishes to see peace and stability in the region not only maintained but enhanced. It also wants its engagement with Asean, which is fairly strong, to expand further. China regards the East Asia Forum as particularly promising and hopes that an Asian Economic Community would be realised one day. China recently signed FTAs with Asean and South Korea.

During the current economic crisis, India has introduced two economic stimulus packages, simultaneously with economic reforms. The nation has not been as significantly affected by the crisis as the more open economies, and expects to return to nine per cent growth in 2011.

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India has been called upon to take an active role in climate change issues. Although there was no legally-binding agreement in Copenhagen, positive factors to be hopeful about were that dialogue has continued, the Kyoto Protocol has been saved, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will remain, and that the principle of differentiated responsibilities between the developed and non-developed countries was upheld.

Malaysia and India have continued to consult each other very closely on all the above issues said Devare and the need also for the two to work closely for their security and social well-being cannot be over-emphasised.

**Dr Stephen Leong** in his presentation said that while the following views may not be official Malaysian government views regarding China, Japan, and the US, they are close to it.

### China

Of the three countries, China with its stupendous economic growth is perhaps the most important to Malaysia.

During the Mao Tse Tung period and the export of China's communist struggle to Malaysia, Malaysia saw China as a threat. However, in 1974, after Mao, Malaysia and China began diplomatic relations, and Malaysia (together with the US and others) voted for China to be in the UN. From then onwards, other than disputes over islands in the South China Sea, Malaysia-China relations developed well.

In 2003, China signed a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and a treaty of strategic partnership with Asean. China's evolutionary development in its ongoing opening-up process, viewing as its top priority economic development, before the political reforms that the West has insisted upon, was something Malaysia has understood. China in turn appreciated Malaysia's non-censure over the Tiananmen Square incident.

Since 1949, China has made great progress, even in political aspects. Though many are concerned about China's military modernisation, Malaysia does not view China as a military threat. Malaysia has observed China engaging with Asean, joining the Asean Regional Forum, and moving more towards multilateralism recognising that it is good for China.

Malaysia sees the development and economic growth of China as very positive, and has seized opportunities in China in the areas of tourism, education, palm oil, and in selling to markets in China. And China, as part of Asean+3, is involved in building the East Asian Community.

### Japan

Relations with Japan have always been very positive. Malaysia has sought to learn how a relatively small country like Japan has risen from the ashes of defeat in World War Two to become the most economically successful Asian country that holds a great deal of wealth and technological know-how.

While some doubts about Japan, such as the quality of its products (Toyota), falling population figures, and a high suicide rate, are beginning to emerge, Malaysia continues to believe in Japan. Although Japan will face very strong competition from China and India in the future, historically, Japan was able to rise to its many challenges. Japan has also proven to be a true friend of Malaysia, particularly during the 1997-98 economic crisis.

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Japan's relationship with China is very critical to Asia. The two nations are aware they have to work together for mutual benefit and in this aspect, Korea and Asean hope to be able to mediate between them.

### USA

Malaysia values its relationship with the United States which, in terms of investors and trade, is one of the top three most important countries for Malaysia. Although under Bush the US image fell greatly, Malaysia looks to the US for global leadership in positive ways. There are hopes for a better US role under Obama.

Leong ended by saying that the root causes for the extreme violence in nations such as Iraq, Africa, Afghanistan, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, needed looking into.

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