

# India shares ASEAN vision for rule-based societies: PM

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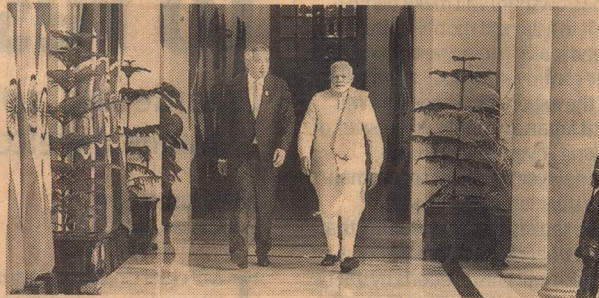
New Delhi, 25 January

Amid concerns over China's increasing assertiveness in the region, India and ten ASEAN countries on Thursday agreed to establish a mechanism for greater maritime cooperation in the maritime domain.

Addressing the plenary session of the India-ASEAN commemorative summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India shared the ASEAN's vision for rule-based societies, peace and freedom of navigation in the region. Ten leaders of the ASEAN, who are chief guests at the Republic Day celebrations, and Modi discussed ways to boost maritime security, connectivity and trade.

Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs Preeti Saran said the leaders discussed issues of greater maritime cooperation and addressed both traditional and non-traditional challenges that "all of us face collectively". While, some of the ASEAN members have maritime disputes with China in East and South China seas, India has land border dispute with its northern neighbour. China, however, downplayed India's hosting of ASEAN leaders on the occasion of its 69th Republic Day.

China, however, criticised Indian media reports that invit-



PM Narendra Modi with his Singapore counterpart Lee Hsien Loong at Hyderabad House in New Delhi on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

ing ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) leaders was aimed at countering its influence. "We hope all countries can work together for peace, stability and development of the region," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said in Beijing. "I want to say that on the Indian side, India media is not very confident and they do not trust us," she said. At the plenary session, the PM also said India and the ASEAN will work towards further enhancing trade that has touched US\$ 70 billion, growing 25 times in the last 25 years. Modi hoped the region would forge new bond of digital connectivity and proposed a dialogue on digital financial inclusion. He suggested a regional high capacity fibre optic network to digitally connect remote areas.

"India offers to undertake a

pilot project on rural connectivity which will create digital village in Cambodia, Laos PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam. Success of this project could be replicated in other ASEAN countries," he said. Modi also offered a training programme for professionals from the ASEAN countries on telecom and networking technology to share best practices in policy, regulation and technological development. Addressing the plenary session of the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit, the PM stressed on maritime cooperation. During bilateral meetings with the ASEAN leaders, Modi told them that he invited them as the ASEAN was at the "fulcrum" of India's 'Act East policy', and their presence in New Delhi underscored the importance they attached to India-ASEAN relations. Modi termed their presence as "historic and

unprecedented".

The PM also spoke with them about importance of the ASEAN in the regional security architecture. The India-ASEAN summit comes at a time when the countries in the region, including non-ASEAN members like Japan, have concerns over increasing Chinese economic and military assertiveness.

The 10 ASEAN leaders who are in New Delhi are Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Myanmar's State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Thai Prime Minister Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha, President of the Philippines Rodrigo Roa Duterte, Lao Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, Malaysian Prime Minister Nazib Razak, Brunei Darussalam's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.