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SOUTHEAST ASIA RESEARCH PROGRAM (SEARP)

PRESS RELEASE

“Through and post the Cold War period, ASEAN was central to the formation of organizations such as APEC and ARF. Today major regional powers such as China and India are changing this through their development. Nevertheless, the geo-strategic importance of ASEAN endures despite these changes”, said Amb. Eric Gonsalves at the commencement of a seminar on *Southeast Asia in the 2010s: Opportunities and Challenges for India*, on 5th March. The seminar was organized by the Southeast Asia research program (SEARP) at IPCS in collaboration with the SAEA Group Singapore.

The panelist comprised of India's leading experts on Southeast Asia namely, Amb. Navrekha Sharma, Former Ambassador to Indonesia; Amb. Rajiv Sikri, Former Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA); Amb. J C Sharma, Former Secretary, MEA and Dr. Srikanth Kondapalli and Dr. Amita Batra from the School of International Studies (SIS), JNU.

Dr. Amita Batra, whose presentation provided an economic prognosis of ASEAN in the 2010s, said that, “One of the first breaks in the upward momentum of growth for Southeast Asia has been the 1997-98 economic crises from which nearly all the countries rebounded fairly quickly. What was noticeable in ASEAN's post-crisis growth trajectory was that it could not match up to their performance prior to the crisis. This was because while all countries recovered, not all had the same amount of success in doing so.”

Dr. Srikanth Kondapalli, whose presentation addressed implications for the rise of China's in Southeast Asia, said that, “While it is leading to several concerns among the ASEAN countries, it is also providing for opportunities and challenges, particularly for India.” Intensifying engagements with China in wake of the January 2010 China-ASEAN FTA on the one hand and on the other balancing the influence of China with other major powers in the region, were two strategic policy directions envisaged by Dr. Kondapalli.

Amb. Rajiv Sikri, commenced his presentation on India's options and challenges in Southeast Asia by clarifying that ASEAN is a regional organization and forum whereas Southeast Asia is a region and the two should not be used interchangeably. He further stressed that, “The Southeast Asian countries are disappointed with the slowed momentum of engagement from the Indian side. One strategic worry that prevails in the minds and heart of the Chinese is India's fruitful engagement with Southeast Asia and a realization of our Look East Policy (LEP). The Chinese will be extremely happy if India does not engage with ASEAN.” The role of Bangladesh, greater financial investments from India, land based connectivity and grassroots cultural initiatives apart from secretariat level engagements to push forward LEP were some points that came up during discussions.

A full report is forthcoming at: www.ipcs.org
For further information please contact:

Dr. Suba Chandran,
Deputy Director,
Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies
B7/3, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi 110029
Ph #: 91-11-4100 1900; Email: subachandran@gmail.com