

## ESM Goh: Asean-India ties key to stable Asia

Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong believes the relationship between Asean and India is “so important” at this juncture because “the world is becoming more dangerous and divided”.

“Will the 21st century be the Asian century or herald Asia’s misery? This question has been on my mind for a long time,” he said at the launch of the book *Asean And India: The Way Forward* at National Library on Wednesday.

“Asia is being divided. A war in Asia is not going to break out tomorrow, but it is not unimaginable in the decades ahead.

“This is precisely why the relationship between Asean and India is so important. We must work together to create the Asia we want. We cannot just be price-taking bystanders.”

The book, co-edited by Ambassador-at-Large Tommy Koh, Institute of South Asian Studies deputy director Hernaik Singh and ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute fellow Moe Thuzar, traces the evolution of Asean-Indian relations over the centuries.

It examines the key areas of convergence and divergence between Asean and India, with the final part exploring the emerging areas where Asean and India can deepen their cooperation.

“I am certainly happy to be here to launch the book on the way forward for Asean and India,” said Mr Goh, who was the guest of honour.

“But the way forward cannot just be about forging closer ties between Asean and India.



(From left) Mr Hernaik Singh, ESM Goh Chok Tong, Prof Tommy Koh and Ms Moe Thuzar.

“Our future must surely be affected by developments in the rest of Asia and the geopolitical relationship between China and the United States.”

India and Asean are home to more than two billion people – about one-quarter of the world population – and have a combined GDP of almost US\$6 trillion (\$8.61 trillion). Both have diverse polities and rich histories, and share long and deep ties.

“I have always believed the 21st century cannot be the Asian century without a successful India,” said Mr Goh.

“When I was Prime Minister, I recognised that forging a strategic

alliance with India would be in Singapore’s and Asean’s interests.

“Singapore strongly advocated for India’s admission to the Asean family in 1992 as a Sectoral Dialogue Partner. Not long after, in 1994, India became a full Dialogue Partner.”

“Singapore continues to advocate and champion for India within Asean. As we enter a period of greater geostrategic flux, it is important, now more than ever, to reinforce the interdependence and strong ties between Asean and India.

“India’s inclusion in the Asean framework strengthens our regional security architecture and adds a stabilising force in the region.”

V.K. Santosh Kumar