



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Title:	INDIA'S SOFT POWER APPROACH IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AFTER 2014
Chairperson:	Gp Capt Ravinder Chhatwal, Senior Fellow, CAPS
Speaker:	Mr Phalak Vyas, Research Fellow, CAPS
Discussant:	Mr Arjun Subramanian P, Associate Fellow, CAPS
Rapporteur:	Ms Tseyang Lhamo, Research Associate, CAPS
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Hard power has become an integral part of statecraft and guarantees nation state's security and symbolises status at the international forum Soft power equally occupies a significant place, particularly at the juncture of growing interdependence among nation states and globalisation. India and Southeast Asian nations are often referred to as 'civilisational neighbours'. India shares close cultural affinities with the region. The fact that India and some of the key players of the region are the fastest growing economies after China, clearly underscores the huge potential in economic co-operation between them. India's major diplomatic push towards strengthening its relations with the region was clearly demonstrated from the initiation of Look East Policy under the Gujral Doctrine. This policy was further revamped as Act East Policy under the current NDA government in order to inject more vigor and substance to this policy. Revamping of Look East Policy implied continuing significance of Southeast Asian nations in India's foreign policy.



With regard to India's soft power approach in Southeast Asia, renewed emphasis has been made on the use of the age old civilizational linkages and India's flourishing economy to boost India's engagement with the region. Buddhism, as a vital component of India's soft power, has played a major role, acting as a converging ground between India and Southeast Asia. Revival of Buddhism and the development of Nalanda University, with assistance from key Southeast and East Asia nations, are outcomes of India's Act East Policy. Buddhism's role as a bridge between Asian nations appears robust. The accompanying culture and India's economy, India's advanced space technology also play an important part in India's soft power approach among the Southeast Asian nations.

China's renewed initiative to highlight its soft power in its diplomacy - particularly its promotion of Confucius institutes and Buddhism - is well known. In fact, India's soft power approach is well encapsulated in three Cs – Culture, Commerce and Connectivity as the centrality of India's foreign policy towards Southeast Asian nations. India and Southeast Asia can be regarded as two out of many poles in today's multi-polar world; both are influential players on the world stage. The two major areas of convergence for India and Southeast Asia are Buddhism and the China factor.
