

Economic foreign relation :

ASEAN-India trade deal to fill Doha void.

The recent failure of global trade negotiations under the World Trade Organization was a powerful stimulus for last week's signing of the ASEAN-India free trade agreement, according to ASEAN secretary-general Surin Pitsuwan.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian nations still has more free trade negotiations in the pipeline with markets including Australia, New Zealand, in the European Union and the United States.

The successful conclusion of the FTA with India will open a market for one billion people for more Asean trade and investment, and is likely to raise the significance of Southeast Asia.

In order to fully benefit from wider market opportunities, Asean itself needs to accelerate its integration, especially for the Asean Economic Community.

One of the most challenging problems, however, remains the development gap between the group's six original members and the four relative new-comers Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Burma.