



19th ASEAN-India Summit

For Prelims: ASEAN, Act East Policy, ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific

For Mains: Significance of ASEAN for India, India-ASEAN Areas of Cooperation

Why in News?

Recently, the Vice President of India attended the **19th ASEAN-India Summit** in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- **Act East Policy:**
 - India hailed the **deep cultural, economic and civilizational ties that have existed between India and South East Asia** from time immemorial and stated that the India-ASEAN relationship forms the **central pillar of [India's ACT-EAST policy](#)**.
 - India reiterated **its support to ASEAN centrality** in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership:**
 - ASEAN and India adopted a **joint statement** announcing the elevation of the existing **Strategic Partnership to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**.
 - It reiterated the **commitment to enhance India-ASEAN cooperation** in various areas such as maritime activities, counter-terrorism, cyber security, digital economy, environment, science & technology, tourism, among other areas.
 - It proposes expediting the review of **[ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement \(AITIGA\)](#)** to make it more user-friendly, simple, and trade-facilitative.
- **Peace and Security:**
 - Both sides reaffirmed the **importance of maintaining and promoting peace**, stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation and overflight in the **[Indo-Pacific region](#)**.
- **Deepening Dialogue and Coordination:**
 - As part of maintaining “**ASEAN-Centrality**”, the two sides reaffirmed the importance of deepening dialogue and coordination through ASEAN-led mechanisms including the ASEAN-India Summit, the East Asia Summit, the Post-Ministerial Conference with India (PMC+1), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), the Expanded **ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF)**.

What is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations?

- **About:**
 - It is a **regional grouping that promotes economic**, political, and security cooperation.
 - It was established in **August 1967 in Bangkok**, Thailand with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
 - Its chairmanship **rotates annually, based on the alphabetical order** of the English names of Member States.

- ASEAN countries have a **total population of 650 million people** and a combined [Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\) of USD 2.8 trillion](#).

▪ **Members:**

- ASEAN brings together **ten Southeast Asian states** – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – into one organisation.



How has Been the ASEAN-India Relations?

▪ **About:**

- ASEAN is considered one of the most influential groupings in Southeast Asia.
- India and several other countries, including the US, China, Japan and Australia, are its dialogue partners.
- The ASEAN-India dialogue relations started with the **establishment of a sectoral partnership in 1992**.
- This graduated to full dialogue partnership in December 1995 and summit-level partnership in 2002.
- Traditionally the basis of **India-ASEAN ties** has been trade and people-to-people ties due to shared historical and cultural roots, a more recent and urgent area of convergence has been balancing China's rise.
 - Both India and **ASEAN aim to establish** a rules-based security architecture for peaceful development in the region, in contrast to China's aggressive policies.

▪ **Areas of Cooperation:**

◦ **Economic Cooperation:**

- ASEAN is India's 4th largest trading partner.
- India signed [FTA \(Free Trade Agreement\)](#) in goods in 2009 and an FTA in services and investments in 2014 with ASEAN.
 - Since the FTA came into effect, the trade between them has **almost doubled to reach over USD 87 billion** in 2019-20 and then declined to USD 79 billion in 2020-21 **due to pandemic-driven slowdown**.
- India has a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with various countries of the ASEAN region which has resulted in concessional trade and a rise in

- investments.
- Commodity trade between India and ASEAN region has **reached USD 98.39 billion in the period April 2021- February 2022.**
- India's main trading ties are with Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand.
- **Political Cooperation:**
 - ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) was established to undertake policy research, advocacy and networking activities with organizations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN.
- **Financial Assistance:**
 - India provides financial assistance to the ASEAN nations through various mechanism like ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund, ASEAN-India S&T Development Fund and ASEAN-India Green Fund.
- **Connectivity:**
 - India has been undertaking several connectivity projects like India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral (IMT) Highway and the [Kaladan Multimodal Project](#).
 - India is also trying to establish a **Maritime Transportation Agreement** with ASEAN and also Plans for a Railway link between New Delhi in India to Hanoi in Vietnam.
- **Socio-Cultural Cooperation:**
 - Programmes to boost People-to-People Interaction with ASEAN are organized, such as inviting ASEAN students to India, Special Training Course for ASEAN diplomats, Exchange of Parliamentarians, etc.
- **Defence Cooperation:**
 - Joint Naval and Military exercises are conducted between India and most ASEAN countries.
 - The maiden **Asean-India Maritime Exercise** will be held in 2023.
 - **Watershed' Military Exercise** held in 2016.
 - Vietnam has traditionally been a close friend on defense issues, Singapore is also an equally important partner.

What is the Significance of ASEAN for India?

- **India needs a close diplomatic relationship** with ASEAN nations both for economic and security reasons.
- Connectivity with the ASEAN nations can allow India to improve its presence in the region.
 - These connectivity projects keep Northeast India at the centre, ensuring the economic growth of the northeastern states.
- **Improved trade ties with the ASEAN nations** would mean a counter to China's presence in the region and economic growth and development for India.
- ASEAN occupies a centralised position in the rules-based security architecture in the Indo-Pacific, which is vital for India since most of its trade is dependent on maritime security.
- Collaboration with the ASEAN nations is necessary to counter insurgency in the Northeast, combat terrorism, tax evasions etc.

Way Forward

- ASEAN and India must **reinforce the trade and investment** relations.
 - India's trade with ASEAN has grown faster than India's trade with the world. India faces significant non-tariff barriers in ASEAN that also limit its export with the ASEAN.
- Current engagement in value chains between ASEAN and India is not substantial. ASEAN and India can leverage **the emerging scenario and support each other to build new and resilient supply chains**. However, to explore this opportunity, ASEAN and India must **upgrade their skilling, improve logistics services** and strengthen the transportation infrastructure.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q1. Consider the following countries: (2018)

1. Australia
2. Canada
3. China
4. India
5. Japan
6. USA

Which of the above are among the 'free-trade partners' of ASEAN?

- (a) 1, 2, 4 and 5
(b) 3, 4, 5 and 6
(c) 1, 3, 4 and 5
(d) 2, 3, 4 and 6

Ans: (c)

Q2. The term 'Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership' often appears in the news in the context of the affairs of a group of countries known as (2016)

- (a) G20
(b) ASEAN
(c) SCO
(d) SAARC

Ans: (b)

Exp:

- Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the five countries (Australia, China, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand) with which ASEAN has existing FTAs.
- **Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.**

Q3. In the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, an initiative of six countries, which of the following is/are not a participant/ participants? (2015)

1. Bangladesh
2. Cambodia
3. China
4. Myanmar
5. Thailand

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2, 3 and 4
(c) 1 and 3
(d) 1, 2 and 5

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. Evaluate the economic and strategic dimensions of India's Look East Policy in the context of the post-Cold War international scenario. (2016)

Source: TH

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/19th-asean-india-summit>