



12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit

The Vice President of India led the Indian delegation to Belgium and attended the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), 2018 in Brussels.

- The theme of the ASEM Summit is 'Global Partners for Global Challenges'.

Asia-Europe Meeting

- The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an intergovernmental process to foster dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe.
- The ASEM was established in 1996 during its first summit in Bangkok, Thailand.
- Initially, It consisted of 15 EU member states and 7 ASEAN member states plus China, Japan, Korea and the European Commission.
- Currently, It has 53 partners: 30 European and 21 Asian countries, the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat.
- The ASEM Summit is held biennially.
- ASEM represents about 62% of the global population, 57% of global GDP and 60% of world trade.
- ASEM addresses political, economic, financial, social, cultural, and educational issues of common interest, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership.

Key characteristics of the ASEM process include:

- ASEM has an informal process of dialogue, that is, it provides an open forum for policy makers and officials to discuss any issue.
- ASEM covers multi-dimensional issues and devotes equal weight to political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions.
- ASEM also emphasize on equal partnership based on mutual respect and mutual benefit and it has dual focus both on high-level meetings as well as and people-to-people.

Three Pillars of ASEM

- Political
- Economic and Financial
- Social, Cultural and Education

India and ASEM

- India joined ASEM during 2nd ASEM expansion in 2006.
- India's first Summit level participation was at the 7th Summit held in 2008 in Beijing.
- India hosted the 11th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Delhi-NCR in 2013
- ASEM provides India a platform to work with like-minded countries.
- India is an active participant in ASEM. Since its inception in the grouping, India has been working with the ASEM in different areas of cooperation like green energy, pharma sector, disaster management, sustainable development and preserving the cultural heritage of two continents.
- The Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF) is the permanently established institution of ASEM. India has regularly contributed to ASEF since becoming a member of ASEM in 2007 to support collaborative

initiatives being undertaken by ASEF.

- During the 12th summit, India used the platform to raise concern about terrorism and urged the international community to work towards the early adoption of the United Nations Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT).
- India also called for cooperation on Climate change and gave an example of the 'International Solar Alliance', as an excellent example of Asia and Europe cooperation.
- India also shared its commitment towards connectivity, free trade, the rules-based international system, in particular, strengthening WTO, multilateralism and cyber-security.

Issues with ASEM

- While high hopes and a mood of optimism prevailed during the first two years of ASEM, the subsequent development of the relationship has not been significant.
- A major criticism of ASEM is regarding the lack of concrete achievements.
- Lack of visibility and public profile is a major problem for ASEM as its awareness in the media and among the wider public remains low.
- Over the time ASEM summits have become increasingly scripted and mundane, and several ASEM summits showed poor attendance.
- The dialogue process has stayed at the information-sharing level and has not moved into substantive cooperation.
- There seems to exist no overall consensus on whether ASEM should be developed as a state-to-state or a region-to-region structure.
 - When ASEM was first conceived, it was seen as an intergovernmental, state-to-state forum. However, over the years the process has adopted features of a region-to-region dialogue because of its intraregional coordination and deepening integration in both areas.
 - This ambiguity is a problem that reflects itself in many contexts of ASEM.
- ASEM dialogue is supposed to be "informal, loose and non-binding, and not intended to produce new agreements, treaties or contracts". Yet, there is the desire to achieve "concrete and substantial results". This lack of clarity in its overall principle and the lack of clearly defined objectives gave rise to different expectations and unrealized potential.
- ASEM's management and coordination are affected by the differences between the two regions in their respective degree of integration. The European partners are very well integrated but coordination and integration are much less developed among the Asian partners.

Way Forward

- ASEM as a unique dialogue forum that links Asia and Europe and is still needed and has its usefulness. Its principles and operations require re-evaluation for the future.
- ASEM's ambiguities must be solved and its identity must be clarified in order to bring it more in line with the ideal and objectives of close interregional cooperation.
- ASEM should be viewed from a long-term perspective. The dialogue in various areas from the official summits to all the different conferences and workshops are building blocks towards greater partnership. At the same time, it is also necessary to deliver on tangible achievements that could be profiled in the media and enhance public interest.