

Association Of Southeast Nations (Asean)-India Relations

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Abstract: Former Indian External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj visited Myanmar, Vietnam and Singapore in 2014 where she spoke about the necessity of Acting East and not just Looking East. In Singapore, she said, “Look East is no longer adequate, now we need Act East”.¹ In November 2014, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi attended the 12th ASEAN-India Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar where he signaled towards action-oriented partnerships between ASEAN and India. Some of his recommendations included a review of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in Goods, implementation of the ASEAN-India FTA on Services and Investment, formation of a Special Purpose Vehicle for easy financing and implementation of the connectivity projects, building Information Highways or i-highways, smart cities, ASEAN-India Solar Project for research, manufacturing and deployment, India-ASEAN Space-related Ground Station in Vietnam, mutual recognition of degrees, increased people-to-people contacts between students, teachers, diplomats, parliamentarians, media personnel, farmers, artists and experts, improving cultural tourism and Buddhist pilgrimage tourism between ASEAN and India.² As India started moving towards action-oriented Act East Policy, the suggestion of late Smt. Swaraj about 3Cs (culture, connectivity and commerce) also gained prominence as three important pillars of ASEAN-India partnership. On 25 August 2014, at the 3rd Roundtable of ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks in Vietnam, Minister Swaraj had mentioned about 3Cs (culture, commerce and connectivity) and 5Ts (Tradition, Talent, Tourism, Trade and Technology)

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Introduction:

India’s Look East Policy (LEP) had its beginning in early 1990s. LEP aimed at orienting India’s foreign policy towards its eastern neighbours, especially the Southeast Asian economies. However, the year 2014 had been a remarkable year as the two-decades old Look East Policy was renamed, upgraded and refurbished as Act East Policy. The year 2022 again signifies another landmark year in the history of India’s partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as both sides are observing the 30 years of dialogue relations. At the diplomatic level, this can also be regarded as a celebration of India’s Act East Policy (AEP), which is a renewed and transformed format of the Look East Policy (LEP). India’s relationship with ASEAN has emerged as a key cornerstone of our foreign policy. The relationship has evolved from the ‘Look East Policy’ enunciated in early 1990s which led India to become a Sectoral Partner of ASEAN in 1992, a Dialogue Partner in 1996 and a Summit-level Partner in 2002. The up gradation of this partnership to Strategic Partnership during the celebration of 20th anniversary Commemorative Summit at New Delhi in 2012 was a natural corollary to the growth of India-ASEAN relationship during last

two decades. The India-ASEAN Strategic Partnership acquired a new momentum with the announcement of “Act-East Policy” in the 12th Summit in 2014. It conveyed a clear intent on the part of India to up-scaling its engagement with the ASEAN Member States. The Act-East Policy emphasizes Connectivity, Commerce and Culture as the focus areas of action for a greater ASEAN-India integration. It takes into account the blueprints of the three pillars of ASEAN community building process, the ASEAN vision document ASEAN 2025-Forging Ahead Together, the ASEAN Master Plan for Connectivity 2025, the ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2020 and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration Work Plan III.

25th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership: India and ASEAN decided to celebrate 25 years of their Dialogue Partnership, 15 years of Summit Level interaction and 5 years of Strategic Partnership in 2017 both in India and in ASEAN Member States. The celebrations involve conducting key activities in various sectors of our engagement to highlight the strengths of the relationship. These activities will culminate in hosting a grand Commemorative Summit of ASEAN and Indian Heads of States/Governments on the theme "Shared

Values, Common Destiny” in India. The celebrations were kick-started with the holding of 2nd ASEAN-India Cultural and Civilizational Conference at Jakarta on 19th January, 2017. A second significant activity was also completed in January when India exchanged congratulatory letters between their excellences Prime Minister Modi and President Duterte as well as between their excellences the External Affairs Minister of India and Secretary General of ASEAN on 28 January, 2017. Many other activities have been concluded, including the ASEAN-India Ministerial/Business Meet in Telecom sector on the sidelines of Telecom Expo in February, 2017, 6th Global Economic Summit with special session on Women Entrepreneurs in ASEAN, Act East Dialogue, Kolkata Dialogue, North-East Business Summit with focus on Connectivity with ASEAN, ASEAN-India Biztech Conference in Kuala Lumpur and ASEAN-India Roundtable 25 years of Partnership etc.

ASEAN-India Foreign Minister’s Meeting The annual ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers Meeting (PMC+1) took place on 6th August, 2017 at Manila which was attended by MOS (VK). India announced its plan to host the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit on 25th January, 2018 and invite all the ten ASEAN Heads of States/ Governments as Chief Guests for the Republic Day Parade on 26th January, 2018. India also outlined the Commemorative Activities it plans to implement in the run-up to the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit.

Vital problems and Disputes

Terrorism. In the security of the region the primary issue confronted is the issue of regional terrorism based oppression in the wide spread of dangers is a bane to the inner harmony. India is likewise the major focus for psychological oppressor assaults and throughout the years fear based oppression has taken a solid hold in making dread among the individuals and in upsetting the harmony, security and dependability.

Migration. The significant foundations for relocation in Southeast Asia are a direct result of financial reasons where the individuals move in look for haven and are for the most part refugees. Particularly the Rohingyas from Myanmar on account of the oppression allotted upon these minorities they are deprived of essential rights and the Myanmar government’s refusal to remember them have driven them to escape from Myanmar by which India also affected.

Maritime. The Maritime security among India and ASEAN incorporates sharing of the Indian sea where

it merges with the South China Sea Maritime. Theft is a test for India and ASEAN particularly in the monetary territory since Southeast Asia being one of the busiest ocean courses on the planet many exchange and monetary related exercises goes through this region.

14th ASEAN-India Summit

Prime Minister attended the 14th ASEAN-India Summit on 08 September, 2016 at Vientiane, Lao PDR. The significant initiatives announced during the Summit were as follows:

- i. Hosting the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in November, 2016 at New Delhi.
- ii. Enhance cooperation in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Exercises, as well as in capacity building for disaster management personnel.
- iii. Develop ASEAN-India network of Business Chambers to structure new commercial partnerships.
- iv. Operationalize the Project Development Fund for CLMV countries.
- v. Establishment of a Joint Task Force on Connectivity to carry forward the exploratory work on the extension of India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.
- vi. Setting up of a regional high-capacity fibre-optic network, supplemented by a national rural broadband network and digital villages in remote areas.
- vii. Operationalize Innovation Platform for utilization of the enhanced S&T Development Fund.
- viii. Flagship ASEAN-India Programme for Combating Malaria.
- ix. Enhance the ASEAN-India Fund with an additional grant of US\$ 50 million.
- x. Hold India-ASEAN Youth Summit.
- xi. Commission a project for mapping of Indian inscriptions along the Mekong river, as well as a project to capture the cultural symbols of our diversity. Create an online resource centre, accessible to all our citizens.
- xii. Host ASEAN as our Guest of Honour for the International Buddhist Conclave in October 2016.

Connectivity Strengthening Connectivity, including land and sea connectivity, with ASEAN is one of the strategic objectives of India and ASEAN Member States. Regular exchanges take place between ASEAN

Connectivity Coordinating Committee (ACCC) and India on Connectivity. The signal effort under the ASEAN-India Connectivity initiative is the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Task Force on Connectivity and Infrastructure has been set-up to undertake time bound work on completion of the Trilateral Highway and also undertake negotiations on the Motor Vehicles Agreement. India and ASEAN are holding consultations on extension of Trilateral Highway to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. India and ASEAN are also working to strengthen the Maritime Connectivity.

India-ASEAN Trade & Economic Cooperation The ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement was signed in 2009 and one on ASEAN-India Trade-in-Services and Investments in 2015. With the signing of these Agreements, the ASEAN-India FTA is complete. ASEAN-India trade rebounded in 2016-17 to reach USD 70 billion after few years of static growth due to global slowdown. FDI inflows into India from ASEAN between April 2000 to December 2016 were US\$ 54.97 billion, which represents 16.81% of the cumulative inflows received by India. Cumulative FDI outflows from India to ASEAN countries, from April 2007 to March 2015, as per data maintained by Ministry of Finance, was about US\$ 38.67 billion.

India-ASEAN Business Council (AIBC) The AIBC consists of eminent Leaders of Business in ASEAN Member States and India. They meet annually on the sidelines of ASEAN-India Economic Ministers' Meeting. A Secretariat for AIBC was established in Malaysia in 2015.

Agriculture ASEAN-India cooperation in the field of Agriculture is diverse and covers a variety of sectors such as food security, exchange of information and technology, research and development projects, agriculture and forestry-related industries, and human resources development. An annual ASEAN-India Agriculture Ministers Meeting (AIMMAF) has been formalized and has met regularly since 2011. The 2nd Medium Term Plan of Action for cooperation 2016-20 is likely to be adopted in 4th AIMMAF to be held in 2017. A number of cooperative activities in Agriculture have been undertaken since 2011.

Space In the field of Space cooperation, ISRO is implementing a project proposal for (i) establishment of Tracking and Data Reception Station and Data Processing Facility at Ho Chi Minh City; (ii) up-gradation of Tracking Telemetry and Command (TTC) Centre at Biak, Indonesia; and (iii) Training of ASEAN Personnel in Space Science and Technology

at the Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific (CSSTEAP).

New & Renewable Energy

Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) convened the 1st ASEAN India Ministerial Meeting on New & Renewable Energy in New Delhi on November 7, 2012 which discussed (a) policy and regulatory frame work across countries for facilitating, promoting and mainstreaming renewable energy; (b) facilitating finance for renewable energy applications; and (c) cooperation in research and development, technology transfer and resource assessment, including developing institutional linkages. The meeting adopted a 'New Delhi Declaration on ASEAN India Cooperation in Renewable Energy'.

Small and Medium Enterprises India has been cooperating in SME sector with ASEAN Member States through a Joint Working Group. India has created a Project Development Fund equivalent to \$ 75 million approx. to develop manufacturing hubs in CLMV countries. India has taken steps to set up an ASEAN-India Innovation Platform by increasing ASEAN India Science and Technology Development fund from US \$ 1 million to US \$ 5 million, to facilitate commercialization of low cost technologies, technology transfer and collaborative R&D projects. Regular interaction takes place between the SME sectors of India and ASEAN Member States.

Environment and Forest ASEAN-India Green Fund was established in 2007 with US\$ 5 million for funding pilot projects to promote adaptation and mitigation technologies in the field of climate change. The 1st Meeting of the ASEAN-India Environment Ministers held on September 6-7, 2012. The Ministers adopted the New Delhi ASEAN India Ministerial Statement on Biodiversity. ASEAN and India are collaborating on several projection Climate Change and bio-diversity through partnership with IISc, Bangalore.

Tourism India-ASEAN cooperation in Tourism Sector is conducted through annual ASEAN India Tourism Ministers Meeting. The 3rd ATM+India meeting in 2012 signed a MoU on Strengthening Tourism Cooperation thereby making India the first Dialogue Partner to sign an MoU on Strengthening Tourism Cooperation with ASEAN. An ASEAN Promotional Chapter for Tourism (APCT) has been established in Mumbai in 2011. A number of activities are conducted every year to promote mutual tourism.

People-to-people connectivity Several projects on people-to-people connectivity are held annually to increase interaction between India and ASEAN Community. Projects which have been carried out on this front are as follows:

- i. **ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks:** ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks established since 2009-10 held its 4th Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in August, 2015. The 5th meeting is slated to be held in Indonesia in 2017.
- ii. **Exchange of Parliamentarians:** Indian parliamentary delegations have been regularly attending the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) since 2010.
- iii. **ASEAN-India Media Exchange Programme:** Forty media personnel visit AMS and India annually under the ASEAN-India Media Exchange Programme.
- iv. **Students Exchange Programme:** A Student Exchange Programme has also been institutionalized under which 250 ASEAN Students visit India annually from ASEAN Member States. The participation has been increased to 500 students in the Commemorative year 2017.
- v. **ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Lecture Series:** AIEPLS is an annual event where Eminent Persons from ASEAN Countries and deliver lectures on topics of relevance and similarly Eminent Persons from India visit the ASEAN Member States to deliver the lectures.
- vi. **Special Course for ASEAN Diplomats:** Annually 30 ASEAN Diplomats including 3 Officials from the ASEAN Secretariat are provided special training at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in New Delhi.

Delhi Dialogue: Delhi Dialogue is a premier annual track 1.5 event since 2009 to discuss politico-security and economic issues between ASEAN and India. Nine editions of Delhi dialogue have been held so far at New Delhi. Delhi Dialogue has an Inaugural Ministerial Session, a Business Session and an Academic Session. It has evolved into a premier event for taking stock of global geo-political movements and their impact on ASEAN-India relations and making recommendations for future direction of this landmark relationship.

ASEAN-India Plan of Action A Plan of Action (2004-2010) was developed to implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity. The 3rd Plan of Action for 2016-

2020 has been finalized after successful implementation of previous one and a list of prioritized activities chalked out for 2016-18. It envisages functional cooperation in a range of sectors in the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres with the objective of capacity building and development, particularly to narrow the development gaps between ASEAN member states under their Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) programme. The financing of POA projects is done through ASEAN-India Fund, Science & Technology Development Fund and Green Fund.

The 20th Century Background of India-Southeast Asia Relations:

The ties between India and Southeast Asia started centuries ago and continued during the colonial era. Until 1867, Singapore was administered from Calcutta.⁵ Burma was a part of British India between 1885 and 1937. In the 1910s and 1920s, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore visited Indonesia, Malaya, Singapore, and Thailand. He also visited Burma, thus completing a significant part of Southeast Asian tour. His memories from Southeast Asia are widely covered in essays and letters.⁶ Tagore was highly influenced by the local and traditional culture in Southeast Asia and wanted to arrange cultural exchanges between India and Indonesia. Southeast Asia does not only figure in Indian literature and cultural discussions, it has a central position even in its strategic thinking. In 1943, K M Panikkar suggested that a regional security framework should be developed including India, Britain, Indonesia and Australia.⁷ After India's independence, many countries in the world including some in Southeast Asia started looking at India as a leader of the so-called Third World countries. In Bandung Conference, the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru joined hands with the Indonesian President Sukarno and other Asian leaders in the spirit of Non-Alignment and reiterated the importance of multiculturalism and democracy. Few months prior to the India-Pakistan conflict in 1965, Singapore declared itself as an independent state, different from Malaysia in August 1965. During the 1965 war, Singapore became one of the first countries to support India. Malaysia too supported India in the United Nations Security Council. Singapore attempted to make India a part of geopolitics in Southeast Asia, owing much to India's status as a leader of non-alignment movement. Simultaneously, Singapore also wanted to project itself free from Chinese influence by bringing India closer to itself. Singapore offered India to train its armed forces, use the abandoned British-made dockyard for ship building and repairing facilities and approached Air India to assist the newly-built Singapore Airlines for technical and manpower cooperation. These, if executed, could have given

India a better position in Southeast Asia long before 1990s. However, the Cold War bipolarity and related complexities forced India to distance itself from the original grouping of ASEAN. However, India accepted Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in 1971 as it represented principle of non-alignment, nonexternal interferences, and formation of an area of peace. Former Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik made a visit to India in 1973 and during this visit, India made an attempt to appreciate ASEAN's efforts of establishing peace in Southeast Asia. The decades of 1970s and 1980s were marked by bilateralism and cordial diplomacy between India and a few Southeast Asian countries. In later period, the economic relations between India and Southeast Asia moved further. By mid 1990s, India had multiple joint ventures in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. By 1996, approved foreign direct investments from Southeast Asian countries were as follows; Singapore (1891.9 million rupees), Malaysia (129.8 million rupees), Indonesia (3133.0 million rupees), Thailand (414.0 million rupees) and Philippines (2557.5 million rupees). 8 This was a result of Indian understanding that it cannot be a trivial player in global politics and economics anymore. Not only economy, but in security perspective too, early 1990s was a justified time to start Look East Policy. The LEP was introduced by former Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao in Singapore as he was delivering the prestigious annual Singapore Lecture. 9 With the end of Cold War, Southeast Asia too experienced vast changes in the political-security scenario. After the USA started to withdraw from the region, the power vacuum was to be filled by immediate external players like India and China where India was somehow considered as a balancing power, owing much to its non-aggressive history with Southeast Asia. 10 These geopolitical reasons were coincided with geo-economic interests as well since New Delhi was looking for meaningful strategic relations with ASEAN in the absence of desired outcomes from the SAARC regional cooperation.

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