

Overview of ASEAN-India Relations

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 08 August, 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration). Currently, it has 10 members which include Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. Timor-Leste was admitted 'In-Principle' as the 11th member of ASEAN and granted 'Observer' status in November, 2022. In all ASEAN related meetings, chaired by one of the ASEAN Member States annually on rotating basis, Timor-Leste has been participating as an Observer since November 2022. A road-map has been finalized at the 42nd ASEAN Summit held in May, 2023; and, Timor-Leste is likely to become a full member of ASEAN after achieving the specific milestones defined in the road map.

2. India began formal engagement with ASEAN in 1992 as a "Sectoral Dialogue Partner" (Secretary level interaction) and subsequently as a "Dialogue Partner" in 1995. The initial years as a Dialogue Partner (DP) entailed interaction at the Foreign Minister level which was further upgraded to the Summit level in 2002. At the 20th anniversary of the relationship, Commemorative Summit was held in New Delhi (December 2012) where our Dialogue Partnership was further elevated to a Strategic Partnership.

3. During the 25-year Commemorative Summit in New Delhi (January 2018), India and ASEAN have further agreed that our Strategic Partnership will be focused *inter-alia* on building cooperation in the maritime domain. Delhi Declaration was issued on the occasion.

4. The year 2022 marked 30 years of ASEAN-India relations and it was celebrated as the 'ASEAN-India Friendship Year'. Its most important outcome was the elevation of ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership to 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)'. A Joint Statement on ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was issued at the Commemorative Summit on 12 November 2022 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

5. The 20th ASEAN-India Summit was held on 07 September 2023 where Indian delegation was led by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Key outcomes included: i) Adoption at Leaders' level of (a) ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Maritime Cooperation, and (b) ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition in Response to Crises.

6. The year 2024 marked 'A Decade of India's Act East Policy'. Started with the visit of ASEAN Secretary General's visit to India (Feb 2024), the year 2024 was several commemorative activities to mark the milestone, which included ASEAN-India Bazaar, 1st ASEAN-India Women Scientists Conclave, celebration of IDY at

ASEAN Headquarters, Artist Camp Exhibition, inauguration of AIPMU at ASEAN Headquarters, 8th edition of ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks (AINTT), 3rd edition of Music Festival, 2nd Startup Festival, Media Exchange visits etc. Mission, in consultation with CSIS-Indonesia, organized a Seminar on the theme, “Commemorating A Decade of India’s Act East Policy: Reflections and the Way Forward for ASEAN-India Relations” in Jakarta on 06 February 2025.

7. At the invitation of Govt. of India, Secretary General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn visited India from 12 to 15 February 2024. During the visit, SG met with the Ministers and Govt. officials. SG delivered 48th Sapru House Lecture on ‘ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the Evolving Regional Architecture’ at ICWA. At Nalanda University, he interacted with the faculty and students and delivered a lecture on “The Future of ASEAN: ASEAN’s Relevance and Resilience in the Evolving Strategic Environment”.

8. Hon’ble Prime Minister led the Indian delegation, for the 11th time, at the 21st ASEAN-India Summit, held at Vientiane, Lao PDR on 10 October, 2024. Two Joint Statements (i) Joint Statement on Strengthening ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Peace, Stability and Prosperity in the Region in the Context of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific with the Support of India’s Act East Policy (AEP); and (ii) ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Advancing Digital Transformation, were adopted at the Summit.

9. The 1st ASEAN-India Track 1.0 Cyber Policy Dialogue was held in Singapore on 16 October 2024 and 1st ASEAN-India Cruise Dialogue was held in Sabang, Aceh, Indonesia on 29-30 October 2024. An MOU between International Solar Alliance (ISA) and ASEAN Centre for Energy (ACE) was signed on 08 October 2024. An MoI between National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) was signed on 24 October 2024.

Policy goals

10. India’s engagement with the ASEAN has been driven primarily by (i) Act East Policy (AEP) with focus on ASEAN; (ii) build on our Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiatives (IPOI); and, (iii) enhancing physical and digital connectivity.

Institutional mechanisms for engaging ASEAN

Summit/AIFMM/AISOM/AIJCC

11. As with any multilateral platform, engagement with ASEAN is a multi-level interaction process. At the apex is the annual summits (“ASEAN-India Summit”) supported by annual meetings at the Foreign Minister level (“ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers’ Meeting”- AIFMM: in ASEAN’s terminology, it is called ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) 10+1 Sessions with Dialogue partners) and the Senior Officials’ Meetings (“AISOM”).

During 2024 cycle, the 26th AISOM was held in New Delhi on 02-03 May, 2024; AIFMM was held in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 26 July 2024; and the ASEAN-India Summit was held in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 10 October, 2024.

For the 2025 cycle, the 27th AISOM was held on 12 March 2025 in Manila; AIFMM is scheduled to be held on 10 July 2025 in Kuala Lumpur; and the 22nd ASEAN-India Summit is scheduled to take place on 27 October 2025 in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia).

12. Generally, the cycle of meetings begins with ASEAN-India Joint Cooperation Committee (AIJCC) meeting. The Jakarta-based AIJCC mechanism comprising Indian Ambassador to ASEAN and the 10 PRs of ASEAN Member States (also called Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN) is a standing mechanism tasked with approving expenditures out of the ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund (AIF), and monitoring follow up to the various Summit level decisions that have been taken. It also supports preparations for the AISOM, AIFMM and AI Summit meetings. The 25th AIJCC was convened on 14 February 2025.

The ASEAN-India Plan of Action & sectoral level Work Plans, for cooperation activities.

13. Mutually beneficial cooperation activities is one of the tools that is used to engage with the ASEAN platform. Cooperation activities are identified as part of the 5 year “Plan of Action (POA)” approved at the Foreign Ministers level and through the Work Plans of cooperation generated during interactions with ASEAN ‘Sectoral Bodies’ (Generally, Indian line ministries attend these meetings). Currently, Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity (2021-2025) & its Annex (adopted in at AIFMM in July to operationalize ASEAN-India CSP) is in operation.

14. To support cooperation activities between ASEAN and India, Govt. of India has created four funds: (i). ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund (AIF); (ii) ASEAN-India Green Fund (AIGF); (iii) ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund (AISTDF); and (iv) ASEAN-India Fund for Digital Future (AIFDF).

Sectoral Dialogue mechanisms:

15. In addition to the Summit – Foreign Minister – SOM – Ambassador level interactions, Indian line ministries also interact with their ASEAN counterparts through sector-specific dialogue mechanisms. Some of the important sectoral interactions which are held at the Ministerial level include:

- **ASEAN Economic Ministers’ Meeting + India Consultation** (Ministerial level): The 21st ASEAN-India Economic Ministers’ consultation was held on 20 September 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. Hon’ble Minister of Commerce and Industry, Shri Piyush Goyal led the Indian delegation.

- **ASEAN-India Tourism Ministers' Meeting:** The 12th ASEAN-India Tourism Ministers' Meeting was held on 20 January 2025 in Johar, Malaysia. The meeting was co-chaired by Hon'ble Minister of Tourism and Culture, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat.
- **ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting + India (ADGMIN+India)** meetings (Ministerial level): The 5th ADGMIN+India meeting was held on 17th January 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand. Hon'ble Minister of State for Communications, Dr. Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar co-chaired the meeting.
- **ASEAN-India Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry (AIMMAF)** (Ministerial level): The 8th ASEAN-India Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry was held on 25 October, 2024 via Video-Conference (Co-Chaired by Myanmar). Hon'ble Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Shri Bhagirath Choudhary led the Indian delegation. The 9th Meeting of ASEAN-India Working Group on Agriculture and Forestry (9th AIWGAF) was held on 08 August, 2024. The 9th Ministerial Meeting is to be hosted by India in 2026.

Other important meetings include:

- **ASEAN-India Senior Officials meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC+India)** (SOM level): The 11th SOMTC+India consultation was held on 27-28 June 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- **ASEAN-India Working Group on S&T (AIWGST)** (Secretary level): The 14th meeting was held virtually on 07 August, 2023 and Dr. Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary (DST) participated in the meeting.

ASEAN-led frameworks

16. In addition to the above India-ASEAN mechanisms, India also engages the ASEAN multilateral platform through participation in meetings of various 'ASEAN-led frameworks' i.e. multilateral platforms chaired by ASEAN. In particular, India regularly participates in the meetings of the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting+ (ADMM+) and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) meetings and its supporting processes. These ASEAN-led frameworks are widely expected to eventually evolve into the principal building blocks of an ASEAN centered regional security architecture.

East Asia Summit (EAS) Process:

17. The most important among the ASEAN-led frameworks is the EAS which is a Leaders-led forum, launched in December 2005, made up of leaders from the 10 ASEAN countries and India, US, Australia, New Zealand, RoK, Japan, Russia, China.

- **East Asia Summit (EAS):** The 19th East Asia Summit was held on 11 October 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. Hon'ble Prime Minister led the Indian delegation. Chairman's Statement was issued on this occasion.
- **East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' Meeting (EAS FMM):** The 14th EAS FMM was held on 27 July, 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. Ministerial meetings are supported by EAS Senior Officials' Meeting (EAS-SOM) and East Asia Summit Ambassadors' Meeting in Jakarta (EAMJ) now called as EAS Group.

Other important EAS Meetings include:

- **East Asia Summit Economic Ministers' Meeting** (Minister level): The 12th meeting was held on 21 September 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. Hon'ble Minister of Commerce and Industry Shri Piyush Goyal led the Indian delegation.
- **EAS Energy Ministers' Meeting** (Ministerial level): The 18th EAS Energy Ministers' Meeting (18th EAS EMM) took place on 27 September 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- **EAS Education Ministers' Meeting (Ministerial level):** The 9th EAS Senior Officials' on Education Meeting and the 7th EAS Education Ministers' Meeting were held on 24 and 26 August, 2024 respectively in Burien Province, Thailand.

ASEAN-Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus)

18. The 11th ASEAN-Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) took place on 21 November, 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. Hon'ble Raksha Mantri Ji led the Indian delegation. ADMM-Plus is supported by Senior Officials' Meeting; Working Group level meetings; and seven Expert Working Group (EWG) mechanisms. India, along with Malaysia, is co-chairing the ADMM Plus EWG on Counter Terrorism for the cycle 2024-2027. The 1st ASEAN-India Informal Defence Ministers' Meeting was held in November 2022.

ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

19. In the ASEAN Regional Forum, the highest-level meeting is held at the Foreign Ministers' level. It is supported by the Senior Officials' Meeting. Several technical working group meetings also take place under ARF. Hon'ble EAM participated at the 31st ARF held on 27 July 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR.

ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA)

20. India participates as an Observer in the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA). Hon'ble MP Rajya Sabha Shri Rameswar Teli represented India at the 45th AIPA General Assembly on 19-22 October 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR.

ASEAN-India Centre (AIC)

21. AIC was established on 21 June, 2013 inside the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi. The Centre has been doing work in support of strengthening the ASEAN-India relations.

ASEAN-India economic engagements

22. The three main formal institutional mechanisms being used to promote the India-ASEAN economic 'connect' are as follows:

- ***ASEAN Economic Ministers' + India Consultations (AEM + India):*** The ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) is one of the main ASEAN's sectoral bodies and therefore AEM-India meetings, one of our most important sectoral body engagements, are attended by the Minister/MoS for Commerce and Industries. In recent times main agenda of discussions in AEM-India meetings has been review of ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA).
- ***The ASEAN India Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation (2003):*** Finalized during the 2nd Summit meeting in 2003, the agreement provides the 'mandate' for the creation of an ASEAN-India Free Trade Area. Subsequently, under its provisions, (i) ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (*AITIGA, signed 2009, in-force 1 January 2010*); (ii) the ASEAN-India Agreement for Trade in Services (*AITISA, signed 2014 and all parties ratified it in 2018*); and, (iii) Agreement on Investment (*signed 2014, have been finalized and ratified by all parties*) were concluded.
- ***ASEAN-India Business Council (AIBC):*** Set up in 2003 as part of the measures contemplated to promote Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between India and the ASEAN region, it was meant to serve as a private sector mechanism to provide Governments on both sides with authoritative feedback on their current policies and also recommend steps that Governments could take to further promote the ASEAN -India economic partnership. The 5th ASEAN-India Business Summit was held at Kuala Lumpur on 06 March 2023 by EoI, Kuala Lumpur. The last AIBC meeting took place on the sidelines of AEM-India Consultation, held in Vientiane on 20 September 2024.

23. Trade in Commodities: The commodity trade between India and ASEAN region has reached USD 120.87 billion in the financial year i.e 2023-2024, with exports to ASEAN worth USD 41.20 billion and imports from ASEAN worth USD 79.67 billion. (*Table 1 & 2*) (*source DGFT*). The ASEAN remained 2nd largest trading partner of India in 2022-23 & 2023-24.

24. Investment: Structurally, investments between India-ASEAN are mainly concentrated on Singapore. Between 2000-2023 cumulative FDIs from ASEAN to India was \$156 billion, but these were mainly accounted for by Singaporean

investments in India. Similarly, India’s outbound investments, mainly concentrated on Singapore are worth USD56 billion for the same period.

TABLE-1

INDIA’S TRADE WITH INDIVIDUAL ASEAN COUNTRIES (2023-2024)				
<i>Trade Figures in Million USD</i>				
S.No.	Country	Export	Import	Total trade
1.	Brunei	67.44	218.76	286.20
2.	Cambodia	185.39	218.40	403.79
3.	Indonesia	5988.88	23410.67	29399.55
4.	Laos	12.88	99.73	112.61
5.	Malaysia	7262.15	12754.11	20016.26
6.	Myanmar	670.37	1075.65	1746.02
7.	Philippines	2097.17	1433.60	3530.77
8.	Singapore	14414.27	21200.86	35615.13
9.	Thailand	5038.97	9909.41	14948.38
10.	Vietnam	5470.15	9345.39	14815.54
	Total	41,207.67	79,666.58	120,874.25
<i>Source: DGFT (13/06/2024)</i>				

TABLE-2

EVOLUTION OF INDIA-ASEAN OVERALL TRADE (1996-2024)					
<i>Trade Figures in Billion USD</i>					
S. no	Year	Export	Import	Total Trade	Net
1	1996-97	2.902	2.934	5.836	-0.032
2	1997-98	2.464	3.396	5.86	-0.932
3	1998-99	1.629	4.317	5.946	-2.688
4	1999-00	2.237	4.629	6.866	-2.392
5	2000-01	2.913	4.147	7.06	-1.234
6	2001-02	3.457	4.387	7.844	-0.93
7	2002-03	4.618	5.15	9.768	-0.532
8	2003-04	5.821	7.433	13.254	-1.612
9	2004-05	8.425	9.114	17.539	-0.689
10	2005-06	10.411	10.883	21.294	-0.472
11	2006-07	12.607	18.108	30.715	-5.501
12	2007-08	16.413	22.674	39.087	-6.261
13	2008-09	19.14	26.202	45.342	-7.062
14	2009-10	18.113	25.797	43.91	-7.684
15	2010-11	25.627	30.607	56.234	-4.98
16	2011-12	36.744	42.158	78.902	-5.414
17	2012-13	33.008	42.866	75.874	-9.858
18	2013-14	33.133	41.278	74.411	-8.145
19	2014-15	31.812	44.714	76.526	-12.902
20	2015-16	25.133	39.909	65.042	-14.776
21	2016-17	30.961	40.617	71.578	-9.656
22	2017-18	34.203	47.133	81.336	-12.93
23	2018-19	37.473	59.321	96.794	-21.848
24	2019-20	31.546	55.369	86.915	-23.823
25	2020-21	31.485	47.420	78.90	-15.93
26	2021-22	42.327	68.07	110.39	-25.75
27	2022-23	44.00	87.58	131.58	-43.58
28	2023-24	41.21	79.66	120.89	-38.45
29	2024-25	(Up to Feb 2025) 35.87	77.09	112.97	-41.20
<i>Source: DGFT</i>					