



East Asia Summit

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What is East Asia-Summit?

The East Asia Summit (EAS) established in 2005 is a forum of 18 regional leaders for strategic dialogue and cooperation on the key political, security, and economic challenges facing the Indo-Pacific region.

Genesis

- The concept of an East Asia Grouping was first promoted in 1991 by the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir bin Mohamad.
- The first summit was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 14 December 2005.
- **Kuala Lumpur Declaration:** EAS is an “open forum” for dialogue on strategic, political, and economic issues in order to promote peace, economic prosperity, and regional integration in East Asia.
- India is a founding member of the East Asia Summit.

Membership

- The EAS comprises the **ten member states** of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam – along with **8 members** Australia, China, Japan, India, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States.
- The EAS membership represents around 54% of the world’s population and accounts for 58% of global GDP.
- The EAS is an ASEAN-centred forum; it can only be chaired by an ASEAN member.

EAS Chair

- The chair of ASEAN is also the chair of the EAS. The role of the ASEAN chair rotates annually between the ten ASEAN member states.
- **Current chair:** 2018 Singapore

- **Future chair:** 2019 Thailand

Areas of Cooperation

- Environment and Energy
- Education
- Finance
- Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases
- Natural Disaster Management
- ASEAN Connectivity

India endorses regional collaboration in all six priority areas.

Institutional Mechanisms

EAS Foreign Ministers' Meeting

Potential

- EAS, representing nearly **50 per cent of the world's population** and over **20 per cent of global trade**, is a mega gathering and is a testimony to the rise of Asia.
- EAS is a region of strong and fast growing economies. It is considered the **third pole of world economy** after the US and Europe. Its four major economic players namely Japan, China, India and Korea are among the twelve largest ranking global economies.
- Financial and monetary cooperation between ASEAN+6 or EAS countries could be an area of fruitful cooperation in view of the fact that their combined foreign exchange reserves exceed \$ 3 trillion. Steps can be taken towards creating an **Asian financial architecture** that would facilitate partial mobilisation of these reserves for narrowing the development gaps in Asia.

Challenges

- **China-Japan** rift casts a big shadow over the EAS and also potential rivalry between **China-India**, as China sees India as competitor not just for investments and markets but also for political and security reasons.
- The second area of tension in EAS relates to the **question of institutionalization and institution building**. The position adopted at the summit clearly makes EAS a ASEAN driven organization.

- The third area of tension is about streamlining the **agenda**. EAS has adopted a very wide agenda and it may not be possible to work effectively on all the parts of the agenda. There is a general understanding that the **economic agenda** will be pursued more vigorously as compared to cultural and **political/security agenda**. Within the economic agenda also, there are indications that the trade matters will be taken up on priority towards building pan-Asian free trade area.
- The fourth area of tension in the EAS is its **relationship with other regional organizations** functioning in the region, such as ASEAN, APEC and various other sub-regional groups. The boundary between ASEAN and EAS is hazy and even confusing. If the purpose of the EAS is to encourage ASEAN community building, then what is ASEAN meant for and what independent identity ASEAN or EAS can retain vis-à-vis each other.
- The growing number of minilateral alignments among the more militarily capable regional powers and vast differences in their military budgets undermines the objectives of regional peace, security and prosperity.

Significance of EAS vis-a-vis APEC

- Similar to EAS, statements and declarations of APEC are not binding. Even though this increases the members' willingness to be active in the process, it decreases the real importance of any outcomes.
- EAS can be more significant as it is majorly Asia specific (except for US and Russia) whereas APEC includes countries such as Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and the European Union, and hence it is difficult if not impossible for APEC to concentrate on issues that are specific to East Asia.
- APEC is more likely to continue to be an Asia-Pacific institution, emphasizing economic and political cooperation across the Pacific Ocean, including between Asia and the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Russia. It is better characterized as a "trans-Pacific," rather than "inter-Asian," process.

Significance for India

- For India it acts as an **alternative to the APEC** in which India doesn't enjoy the membership.
- India's membership to the EAS is a **recognition of its fast growing economic and political clout**.
- **Act East policy of India:** In order to build multi-faceted relations with ASEAN and other multilateral nations and strengthen bilateral relations India has emphasised upon its L Act East Policies for which EAS will prove crucial.

- During the 2008 economic crisis, the EAS as a group grew at considerably higher rates than the average growth in developed countries. Deeper integration with the EAS members, therefore, helped **sustain India's external sector as an engine of growth**.
- China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and the nature of its growing investments has led the ASEAN countries to view **India as a potential power that could balance a rising China**.
- India's strength lies in service sector and information-technology and Japan has a sound capital base. Thus there are **complementarities in trade and production structures of the EAS members**.
- India is also keen on **monetary integration of the EAS region** and cooperation in the energy sector. India's infrastructural sector will need investments of more than US\$500bn in the coming 4 to 5 years. The East Asian countries are already involved in India's infrastructural sector and they can take further advantage of the opportunity available.
- **Trade:** South China Sea is a busy waterway through which half of India's trade passes, hence for freedom of passage in the international waters, this area becomes crucial.
- For implementation of **connectivity projects**, such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, and building new trade and transport linkages with all the EAS member states, the summit gains significance.
- There are prospects of the Indian private sector being involved in defence production and supplies which will greatly improve India's **defence diplomacy** in the region. India has also conducted naval exercises with almost all the EAS members and is actively participating in counter-terrorism efforts under the ASEAN, ARF and BIMSTEC frameworks of sub-regional 40 groupings.
- India's deep cultural and civilizational links with the EAS countries are widely known. India can play a major role in **cultural and people to people cooperation** with the region, which can reinforce the economic momentum for community building.

13th East Asia Summit

- The 13th East Asia Summit was held on November 15, in Singapore. The Meeting was chaired by Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore - H.E. Lee Hsien Loong.
- The summit was attended by Heads of State/Government of EAS members and secretary general of ASEAN.

Features

- The Summit members welcomed the adoption of the **Manila Plan of Action** to advance the Phnom Penh Declaration on the EAS Development Initiative (2018-2022) with the inclusion of **maritime cooperation as a new area of cooperation**.
- There was an initiative to **promote natural gas in improving energy security** in EAS countries, recognising its role in the transition to low-emissions economies.
- It recognised that **marine debris pollution** is a global concern and hence EAS Leaders' Statement on Combating Marine Plastic Debris was adopted.
- The summit reiterated its commitment to work together in the area of '**education**' through aligning EAS cooperation with the ASEAN Work Plan on Education.
- The summit mentioned implementation of the **Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity** (MPAC) 2025, to achieve integration of the community.
- The summit highlighted **regional and international issues**:
 - **South China Sea** – for promoting peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation in South China Sea and to implement Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.
 - **Korean Peninsula** – The summit urged North Korea to complete denuclearisation and its pledge to refrain from further nuclear and missile tests.
 - **Counter-Terrorism** – It condemned terrorist attacks in recent months that had caused significant loss of life. Also adopted the EAS Leaders' Statement on Countering Terrorism.
 - **Regional Economic Integration** – The summit welcomed the progress made in Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations in 2018 and emphasised economic inclusiveness.

Way Forward

- Though India is not a part of the TPP negotiations, it is an important part of the RCEP negotiation process and has much to offer to the EAS and also gain in return, especially in areas like maritime security, terrorism, non-proliferation, irregular migration. Hence, this growing partnership represents a win-win equation for both India and the EAS.
- East Asia is the world's most dynamic economic region as well as one of its most challenging security environments. Maintaining regional integrity through cultural connectivity is crucial. The other initiatives could include creation of an Asian currency unit as a unit of account to facilitate intra-regional trade and production networking.
- While the region is facing similar regional issues the EAS platform has wide capacity to discuss deliberately upon these issues and drawing balanced solutions in order to benefit equitably.

- India's participation in EAS symbolises its continued commitment to strengthening engagement with Asean member states and with the wider Indo-Pacific region which has ramifications for RCEP, India's Act east policy and its stature as global power significant in Indo Pacific.