



24th ASEAN-India Meeting

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 **24th ASEAN-India Senior Official's Meeting (SOM)** was hosted in Delhi.

- India and ASEAN celebrated the 30th anniversary of their Dialogue Relations.
- Earlier, the **2nd ASEAN Digital Ministers' (ADGMIN) Meeting** with India held, where two sides **finalized India-ASEAN Digital work plan 2022** for future collaboration in the field.

What is 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**. It is India's 4th largest trading partner with about USD 86.9 billion in trade.

▪ Members:

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

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ASEAN GROUPING



What are the Key Highlights?

- The SOM reviewed the ASEAN-India strategic partnership and its future direction.
- The leaders made their assessment on the progress of cooperation under three pillars of Partnership – **Political-Security, Economic and Socio-Cultural**.
- The meeting deliberated on the **steps for further implementation of the ASEAN-India Plan of Action (2021-2025)**.
- The two sides **exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest** including the Covid-19 pandemic and post-pandemic recovery.
- Underlining the India's vision of the Indo-Pacific, emphasized the implementation of the **ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Cooperation on [ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific \(AOIP\)](#)** to strengthen the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership.
- The ASEAN side appreciated **India's support to ASEAN and ASEAN-led architecture** in the region.

How has Been the ASEAN-India Relations?

- **About:**
 - ASEAN, a 10-nation grouping, 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.
 - 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.
 - **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.
 - 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

- With China having three times more commercial flights than India to Southeast Asia, improving **air connectivity between India and ASEAN countries should also be high on the agenda.**
- India can become **the military partner** after the **Atma Nirbar Bharat, Make in India** projects are successfully implemented.
- There is need to expand the Concept of QUAD to include **the ASEAN countries and become a QUAD+ arrangement.**
 - Vietnam and Indonesia have expressed a **positive note on QUAD in the region.**
- Tourism can be **encouraged between India and the ASEAN** with some creative branding by the two sides.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous year Question (PYQ)

Q. 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)

Exp:

- Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has free trade agreements with six partners, namely the People's Republic of China, Republic of Korea, Japan, India as well as Australia and New Zealand. Hence, 1, 3, 4 and 5 are correct.

Q. 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)

- **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.

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