

INSIGHTS INTO SANSAD TV



SANSAD TV: PERSPECTIVE INDIA-ASEAN RELATIONS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdKJcXG3YgU>

Introduction:

India hosted the Special ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' meeting to mark the 30th anniversary of its dialogue relations and the 10th anniversary of its Strategic Partnership with ASEAN. Addressing this meeting External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar emphasised that the 10-nation grouping's role is more important today given the geopolitical challenges and uncertainties faced by the world. ASEAN is central to India's Act East Policy and its vision for the wider Indo-Pacific. ASEAN-India dialogue relations started with the establishment of sectoral partnership in 1992 which

graduated to full dialogue partnership in December 1995, Summit level Partnership in 2002 and Strategic partnership in 2012. The India-ASEAN collaboration is guided by the Plan of Action 2021-2025 which was adopted in 2020.

ASEAN role in Indo-Pacific:

- Central to Modi's speech always is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) unity, which he says was essential for a **stable future for the region and that Asean lies at the heart of the new Indo-Pacific.**

India's stress on the centrality and unity of Asean for securing the region

and maintaining a rules-based order is important.

- A united Asean backed by major powers will be able to counter an expansionist China.
- China, which is looking to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean, will be forced to focus more on South China Sea.
- This can be offset if countries like India, the US and Japan work together to build infrastructure and provide development assistance to these countries to prevent them from falling under Chinese influence.

India-ASEAN relations

- Free Trade Agreement: India signed a FTA in goods in 2009 and an FTA in services and investments in 2014 with ASEAN.
- Apart from this, 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.
- India's investment in ASEAN during the same period has been more than \$40 billion.

Trade between India and ASEAN stood at \$65.04 billion in 2015-16 and

comprises 10.12 per cent of India's total trade with the world.

- Connectivity is another important issue of convergence, with India working toward formalizing its transit agreements and establishing better connectivity infrastructure with this region through land, water, and air, example- India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multimodal Project.
- Security: ASEAN platform allows India to discuss non-traditional security issues in Indian Ocean Region (IOR) like piracy, illegal migration, and trafficking of drugs, arms, and human, maritime terrorism, etc. which can only be resolved on a multilateral level.
- India has also scored several diplomatic successes at ARF, including maintaining ties after its nuclear test of 1998, isolating Pakistan during the Kargil War, and lobbying against Pakistan's entry in the forum till 2002.
- The aggressive rise of China, both economically and militarily, has caused suspicion among the countries in the region. This provides an opportunity to India which seeks to balance China and gain cooperation in the region.

India's actions under Act East policy:

- **India's Act East Policy** focusses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The policy which was originally conceived as an economic initiative, has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions including establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation.
- The Objective of "Act East Policy" is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region
- Relations with ASEAN have become multi-faceted to encompass security, strategic, political, counterterrorism, and defence collaboration in addition to economic ties.
- India has been an active participant in mechanisms like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), in ASEAN-led frameworks like the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, the ASEAN Regional Forum as well as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and the Mekong-Ganga Economic Corridor.
- India has also been convening the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, in which the navies of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) participate. India has boosted its engagements with Australia and New Zealand and has deepened its cooperation with the Republic of Korea.
- Through the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation, India is stepping up its interactions with the Pacific Island countries. India's growing partnership with Africa can be seen through the convening of mechanisms like the India-Africa Forum Summits.
- India's multi-layered engagement with China as well as strategic partnership with Russia underlines its commitment to ensuring a stable, open, secure, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- In addition to reviving the economic partnership, India has focused on promoting connectivity with other ASEAN states through Myanmar and Thailand.
- AEP has imparted greater vigour to India's ties with ASEAN.
- AEP has sought to significantly expand its geographical coverage beyond ASEAN alone, to include other countries like Japan, Australia, Pacific Island nations, South Korea, and Mongolia.
- India's partnership with Japan has witnessed the most dynamic growth.

- India's AEP has also impacted relations with the United States.
- By aligning India's Act East Policy with the U.S. pivot to Asia, India seeks to expand its geo-strategic space to contend with China's growing assertiveness and foster balanced relations.

Enhancing India-Asean relation further

- The loss of US market by the ASEAN nations can be compensated with the domestic demand in India which has been increasing with the rise of middle class in the country.
- In terms of security challenges, both ASEAN and India are faced with grave vulnerabilities with regard to terrorism and it is in their common interest to work together to build peace and security in the region.
- With the withdrawal of US troops from strategic locations in the region, ASEAN countries justifiably perceive India, with the largest Naval forces in the Indian Ocean and nuclear capabilities, a strategic partner to balance China's growing power in the region.
- While East Asia is on the verge of entering a phase of lower share of working age population India is entering a phase with a higher share of working age population which can prove to be a

human resource base for East Asia.

- Along with East Asian specialization in manufactures, India's strength in services could result in a formidable strategic combination which may be mutually beneficial for both the sides.
- India has welcomed the Indo-Pacific document by ASEAN and is pushing for early conclusion of code of conduct on South China Sea by ASEAN and China.

Conclusion

The region has become **strategically important for India** due to its growing importance in the world politics. And for India to be a regional power as it claims to be, continuing to enhance its relations with ASEAN in all spheres must be a priority.