



AIC COMMENTARY

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ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit 2022: Outcomes and Way Ahead

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Under the Chairmanship of Cambodia, the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits and other related summits were held in the second week of November 2022 in Phnom Penh. ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit was also held back to back. In the light of these developments, this commentary highlights the major outcomes for India. This also underlines the importance of ASEAN-India partnership in the emerging Indo-Pacific.

India and Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries are bound together by their shared history and culture. There has been steady progress in India's relations with ASEAN since the Look East Policy (LEP) was initiated in 1992, which later upgraded into the more serious Act East Policy (AEP) in 2014. India's engagement in the region is primarily structured through the ASEAN, which is a rules-based regional process. This year marks thirty years of India-ASEAN partnership.

India became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992. In 1996, this was upgraded to a full dialogue partnership. In 2002, India became a Summit level partner of ASEAN. In 2012, ASEAN and India became the strategic partners. In 2018, ASEAN and India commemorated 25 years of dialogue partnership and 15 years of Summit level partnership. In 2022, ASEAN and India complete their three decades of dialogue partnership, and the relation between them is now upgraded into the comprehensive strategic partnership. The ASEAN remains a major driving force for speeding up cooperation between Southeast Asia and India in the backdrop of unfolding Indo-Pacific.

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The 19th ASEAN-India Summit to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 12 November, 2022. Given the significance of this long-standing ASEAN-India relation, the Indian delegation was led for the first time by the Vice-President of India for the 19th ASEAN-India Summit.

In this year, there were a total eight summits at Phnom Penh (Table 1). One of the important outcomes of the 19th ASEAN-India Summit is that the ASEAN-India partnership is now elevated from the Strategic Partnership (SP) to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) level¹. This is extremely important for both the parties. Furthermore, ASEAN signed the CSP with China and Australia in 2021. In view of the unfolding geo-political development, this CSP is going to play a major role in guiding the relations forward.

Table 1: ASEAN and Related Summits, 2022

| Particulars | Summits |
|------------------------|---|
| ASEAN | 40 th and 41 st Summits |
| ASEAN-India | 19 th Summit |
| ASEAN-Australia | 2 nd Summit |
| ASEAN-China | 25 th Summit |
| ASEAN-Korea | 23 rd Summit |
| ASEAN-US | 10 th Summit |
| ASEAN-Japan | 25 th Summit |
| ASEAN-UN | 12 th Summit |

Source: Authors' own

The comprehensive strategic partnership is expected to boost ASEAN-India maritime linkages. ASEAN announced the declaration on mainstreaming four priority areas of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) within ASEAN-led mechanisms at the Summit. The strengthening of ties may result in improved coordination between India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and ASEAN's AOIP. This synergistic approach may allow India and ASEAN to collaborate even more closely in maritime domain.

Outcomes from ASEAN Summits

During the Summit, both the parties have recognized their deep civilizational linkages, maritime connectivity and shared cultural heritage. Also, these have grown stronger over the last 30 years and serve as a solid basis for ASEAN-India relations. In particular, ASEAN has emphasized on the followings:

¹ Refer, the Joint Statement issued on 12 November 2022, available at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/3.-Final-CS-19th-ASEAN-India-Summit.pdf>

First, the ASEAN has reaffirmed their commitment to support and empower women in entrepreneurship and economic growth, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ASEAN has adopted the *Declaration on Building a More Sustainable, Inclusive, and Resilient Future Unlocking Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN*².

Second, ASEAN has emphasized the important role that women play in maintaining peace and stability in the region. They have also adopted the *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace, and Security*, which aims to take concrete actions at the national and regional levels in the areas of protection, participation, prevention, and relief and recovery for women in relation to peace and security.³

Third, ASEAN member states have made progress in their efforts to recover from the pandemic and maintain peace, safety, and security. There has been a transition from the pandemic to the endemic phase, as demonstrated by the easing of travel restrictions and health protocols. ASEAN has also made progress in its collective response to COVID-19, including the use of the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund to procure vaccines for public health emergencies. During the Summit, ASEAN has also praised the member states for strengthening their emergency preparedness, response, and resilience and noted the progress made in the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) and its implementation plan. ASEAN is looking forward to the continued partnership and operation of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) and the finalization of the ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System (APHECS). It is also recognized that there is a need to follow up on the EAS Statement on Mental Health Cooperation to encourage regional and international cooperation on mental health issues.

Fourth, ASEAN has made progress in achieving its goals and ambitions related to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), particularly through the implementation of the Consolidated Strategy on the 4IR for ASEAN (CS4IR). The recently established ASEAN 4IR Task Force Group under the Joint Consultative Meeting (JCM) may help coordinate and monitor ASEAN's efforts in this area.

Fifth, ASEAN has emphasized the importance of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in driving economic development. They have

² Refer, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/31-ASEAN-Declaration-on-Building-More-Sustainable-Inclusive-and-Resilient-Future-Unlocking-Womens-Entrepreneurship-in-ASEAN.pdf>

³ Refer, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/32-ASEAN-Regional-Plan-of-Action-on-Women-Peace-and-Security.pdf>

recognized the efforts to improve the skills of the workforce and increase market opportunities for enterprises through initiatives like the ASEAN SME Academy and ASEAN Access. The Joint Statement outlines several steps that have been agreed upon by ASEAN competition agencies to strengthen competition in the region and increase government engagement to create a more resilient ASEAN.

Sixth, the ASEAN Tourism Ministers have been working to address the challenges caused by the pandemic and to revitalize the ASEAN tourism industry through innovative solutions that improve travel safety, hygiene, and the quality of tourism products. During the Summit, ASEAN has addressed the progress made in implementing the Post-COVID-19 Recovery Plan for ASEAN Tourism, including the completion of a study on the implementation of mutual recognition arrangements for tourism professionals and the development of a framework for sustainable tourism in the post-COVID-19 period. ASEAN has agreed to support tourism MSMEs as outlined in the Phnom Penh Declaration on Transforming ASEAN Tourism⁴.

Seventh, ASEAN has reaffirmed the importance of the AOIP as a guide for ASEAN's engagement in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. They have acknowledged the importance of ASEAN-owned and ASEAN-led processes in implementing the AOIP. To that end, they have adopted the *ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Mainstreaming Four Priority Areas of the AOIP within ASEAN-led Mechanisms*. They have called on ASEAN sectoral bodies to take steps to strengthen coordination in the promotion and implementation of the principles and priority areas of the AOIP and to develop cross-pillar and cross-sectoral synergies within ASEAN⁵.

Major Outcomes of ASEAN-India Summit

i) Peace, Stability and Prosperity

India's long-standing partnership with ASEAN reaffirms its commitment to ASEAN Centrality and ASEAN-led mechanisms in maintaining and upholding peace, security, and prosperity, to maintain the positive momentum of ASEAN's proactive contribution to the UN peacekeeping operations and the inclusion of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, to strengthen ASEAN's competitiveness and regional integration, and to ensure the health, well-being, and social protection for their people. Both the parties in the summit

⁴Refer, https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/23-Phnom-Penh-Declaration-on-Transforming-ASEAN-Tourism_Final.pdf

⁵ Refer, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/25-ASEAN-Leaders-Declaration-on-Mainstreaming-Four-Priority-Areas-of-the-ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific-within-ASEAN-led-Mechanisms.pdf>

resolute to promote practical cooperation with India within ASEAN-led mechanisms in the key priority areas identified in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), namely, maritime cooperation, connectivity, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, and economic and other possible priority areas of cooperation, in accordance with the AOIP's objectives and principles. ASEAN and India both evoked the ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Cooperation from the last year on the AOIP for Peace, Stability, and Prosperity in the region, and emphasized on the effective implementation through ASEAN-led mechanisms.

Both the parties also agreed to step up maritime cooperation in the areas such as anti-piracy operations, armed robbery of ships, maritime safety, search and rescue (SAR) operations, humanitarian assistance, and emergency response and relief. Both sides announced plans to strengthen collaboration against terrorism and transnational crimes, including international economic crimes and money laundering, cybercrime, drugs and human trafficking, through implementation of the ASEAN Plan of Action in Combating Transnational Crime (2016-2025), and arms smuggling, among other security measures. During the deliberation, military medicine was also brought up.

ii) Digital Economy

ASEAN is a rapidly expanding consumer market with a growing middle class and an increasingly digitally connected population. As a result, beyond the movement of goods and physical connectivity, ASEAN and India must also investigate ways to improve digital connectivity.

ASEAN and India both agreed to improve ASEAN-India digital economy cooperation through a series of regional capacity-building activities such as Hackathons in digital transformation, digital trade, digital skills and innovation programs. They should explore fintech cooperation including unified and interoperable digital financial systems between ASEAN and India, which would expand opportunities for businesses and e-commerce.

During the summit, the importance of strengthening the ASEAN-India connectivity partnership was emphasized, and participants expressed a desire to expand digital connectivity cooperation toward the digital economy through the proper implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025. In this regard, the ASEAN-India Business Council (AIBC) has been encouraged to play a larger role in promoting business-to-business and economic cooperation between ASEAN and India, particularly in the areas of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and digital transformation, through

capacity building measures and the sharing of best practices for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), healthcare, start-ups and technology, connectivity, and women and youth empowerment. At the 40th and 41st Summits, ASEAN has put priorities on strengthening the digital economy of the region and has sought for cooperation from all partners.

iii) Energy Transition

ASEAN and India have also discussed the progress in implementing the ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (APAEC) Phase II 2021-2025, which frames the region's work towards energy transitions and resilience and aims to respond to both the impact of the pandemic and the long-term requirements of sustainable development. The summits also addressed the launch of two important energy outlooks by the ASEAN Energy Ministers in September 2022, i.e., 7th ASEAN Energy Outlook and the 2nd ASEAN Renewable Energy Outlook: Towards Regional Energy Transition. These programmes also helped in the implementation process of the APAEC. It may facilitate outlining the future course of actions and opening up the potential pathways for achieving the region's energy agenda, monitor access and social impact, and assess options for accelerating the deployment of renewables, cleaner energy technologies and end-user electrification.

Also, both of them have recognized the strong outlook for global minerals and metals demand through 2050 and beyond, as well as the opportunities for ASEAN to play an important role in the minerals value chain, including emerging requirements of the global energy transition and digital age technologies. The commitment of the ASEAN Ministers in charge of minerals cooperation (AMMin) has been appreciated to direct cooperation toward promoting the region as a minerals investment destination. To sustainably develop the region's resource base, they also strategize the successful implementation of the ASEAN Minerals Cooperation Action Plan (AMCAP-III) Phase 2: 2021-2025.

iv) Enhancing Capacities for Prevention and Preparedness in Health Sector

ASEAN and India reaffirmed their commitment in the summit to enhancing collaboration in the region's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. ASEAN expressed gratitude to India for its assistance in recovering from the pandemic, including its US\$ 1 million contribution to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund and its vaccine contributions to countries in the region bilaterally and through various initiatives such as the ASEAN Quad Vaccine Initiative. Both

parties agreed to collaborate in vaccine-related areas such as development, technology transfer, including capacity building and expertise exchange, production and distribution, research, development, and innovation in generic medicines, cooperation on traditional medicines, strengthening public health infrastructure, and enhancing capacities for pandemic and public health emergency prevention, preparedness, and response.

v) Integration and Connectivities

From the ASEAN standpoint, India's role towards integration and connectivity is vital. So, they emphasized the importance of enhancing physical and digital connectivity cooperation, including through the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 and exploring synergies between the MPAC 2025 and India's connectivity initiatives under the 'Act East Policy' in accordance with the 'Connecting the Connectivities' approach. One of the most significant initiatives towards this is the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. All were looking forward to the completion and operation of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, as well as its extension to Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam in the near future.

ASEAN appreciated India's partnership in development assistance to ASEAN and looked forward to India's continued support for ASEAN's efforts in narrowing the development gap within ASEAN, especially through the implementation of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan IV (2021-2025), addressing the promotion of collaboration on the digital development, cyber-security, fintech cooperation, smart agriculture, safe and sustainable tourism, climate change, sustainable development, education, MSMEs, healthcare, people-to-people contacts and connectivity. Furthermore, ASEAN acknowledged India's support in strengthening sub-regional cooperation, including through the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), promoting equitable and sustainable development across ASEAN.

Conclusion and Way Forward

ASEAN and India must reinforce their trade and investment relations. The Act East Policy and IPOI have brought optimism into the ASEAN-India Partnership, and this will drive both sides to explore new avenues of cooperation. A stronger ASEAN-India partnership would boost multilateralism, which is currently facing many challenges. Moving from SP to CSP, addressing regional challenges and appropriate solutions together while ignoring minor

differences, is what we require and must respect.⁶ ASEAN-India should collaborate on regional and global issues of mutual concern, while attempting to strengthen their partnership with the help of ASEAN-India CSP, which will contribute to further strengthening ASEAN-India relations through strategic cooperation for regional peace, stability, and prosperity. In 2023, ASEAN and India will have their 20th Summit at Jakarta, and India and Indonesia have just swapped their G20 presidency. Contrary to popular belief, the ASEAN-India partnership offers many important lessons to the G20 process.

⁶Refer, for example, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-insight/international-affairs/deciphering-the-19th-asean-india-summit-101668326275119.html>

About AIC



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Considering the work of the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group (AIEPG), and its Report with recommendations for forging a closer partnership for peace, progress and shared prosperity, the Heads of the State/Government of ASEAN and India at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit 2012, held at New Delhi on 19-20 December 2012, recommended the establishment of ASEAN-India Centre (AIC), which was formally inaugurated by the Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of the Government of India on 21 June 2013 at RIS. AIC serves as a resource centre for ASEAN Member States and India to fill the knowledge gaps that currently limit the opportunities for cooperation. AIC works with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India and undertakes evidence-based policy research and provide policy recommendations.

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