



Ministry of Commerce & Industry

India's renewed focus on Major FTAs

Relevant to M&M - IO Team

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Context

Recently, India participated in the 18th India-ASEAN Summit at the invitation of Brunei, the current Chair of ASEAN. The Year 2022 has been highlighted as India-ASEAN Friendship by the leaders. India-ASEAN Summit is held every year and provides an opportunity for India and ASEAN to engage at the highest level.

Key Takeaways

ASEAN in Act East Policy

- The centrality of ASEAN in India's Act East Policy and in India's Vision for the wider Indo-Pacific Vision has been underlined.
- Welcomed the adoption of the India-ASEAN Joint Statement on cooperation for peace, stability, and prosperity in the region, building upon the synergies between the ASEAN Outlook for the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).
- Recently, India also addressed the 16th East Asia Summit, where it reaffirmed India's focus on a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific and the principle of ASEAN Centrality in the region.

India-ASEAN Connectivity

- Exchanged views on enhancing India-ASEAN connectivity in broadest terms including physical, digital and people to people.

- India announced its support for establishing the ASEAN Cultural Heritage List to further strengthen India-ASEAN cultural connectivity.

Trade and Investment

- The importance of diversification and resilience of supply chains for post-Covid economic recovery and in this regard, the need to revamp the India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has been underlined.

Rule-Based Order

- Regional and international issues of common interest and concern, including South China Sea and terrorism.
- The importance of promoting a rules-based order in the region including through upholding adherence to international law, especially the UNCLOS.

Covid-19

- Highlighted India's efforts in the fight against the pandemic in the region and also reiterated support for ASEAN's initiatives in this regard.
- India has contributed medical supplies worth USD 200,000 to ASEAN's humanitarian initiative for Myanmar and USD 1 million for ASEAN's Covid-19 Response Fund.

India-ASEAN and China

- 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.

- Like India, several ASEAN members such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei have territorial disputes with China, the China factor does form an important component of the relationship.
- India in 2014 reinvigorated the Look East policy into Act East, with a more strategic outlook than its previous incarnation, focusing on engagement not just with Southeast Asian countries but also those in the Pacific.

Way Forward

To further strengthen India-ASEAN cultural connectivity, Prime Minister announced India's support for establishing the ASEAN Cultural Heritage List. On trade and investment, he underlined the importance of diversification and resilience of supply chains for post-COVID economic recovery and in this regard, the need to revamp the India-ASEAN FTA.