



CENTRE FOR AIR POWER STUDIES

In Focus

New Delhi

CAPS InFocus: 47/2024

01 November 2024

Key Takeaways from 21st India-ASEAN Summit: A Comprehensive Partnership

Ms Simran Walia

Associate Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies



Source: PM India Gov Website



Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS]

This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution – Non-Commercial – No Derivatives 4.0 International License.

Keywords: India, ASEAN, Security, Indo-Pacific

With increased commercial and investment flows, friend-shoring, and people-to-people interactions, ASEAN-India relations have only strengthened. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) level has been reached in the relationship between ASEAN and India. The 21st ASEAN-India Summit was held on October 10 in Vientiane, Laos.¹ This year's summit holds more pertinence as the year 2024 also marks a decade of India's Act-East Policy.

At the India-ASEAN Leaders' Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged "respect" for "each other's national integrity and sovereignty" while announcing a 10-point plan and emphasising the importance of communication and collaboration between India and ASEAN during a time of conflict and tension in many parts of the world.²

The 10-point plan by PM Modi also includes recognising 2025 as the ASEAN-India Year of Tourism, for which India will provide USD 5 million to cooperative endeavours, celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Act East Policy, establish a regular ASEAN-India Cyber Policy Dialogue mechanism to improve cyber and digital resilience among other aspects such as providing additional scholarships for ASEAN students in Indian Agricultural Universities.

The goal of India's Act East policy is to access the ASEAN markets, which are seen as youthful, vibrant, and dynamic. Indian businesses have already increased their footprint in infrastructure, IT, and healthcare industries. Southeast Asian nations benefit from these collaborations by diversifying their supply networks. In the event of worldwide interruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, this would be beneficial. Additionally, India receives significant investment from ASEAN nations, particularly Singapore.

PM Modi examined the relationship and mapped out its future course with the ASEAN grouping's leaders. Given that connectivity is a key component of India's engagement with ASEAN, the country has good reason to stress the significance of resilience and connectivity. This is due to India's desire to gain influence over the diaspora in ASEAN nations, which account for up to 20 per cent of the global Indian diaspora. By the end of 2024, India hopes to have direct flight connectivity with two more ASEAN nations in addition to the present seven ASEAN countries. ASEAN is one of India's top investment and trading partners.

Additionally, India and ASEAN decided to work together on emerging technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), Robotics, Quantum Computing, 6-G, establishment and bolstering of the start-up ecosystem with particular emphasis on digital connectivity and financial technology. They also released a joint declaration on "advancing digital transformation," which addressed a number of topics, including cybersecurity, fintech, and digital public infrastructure.

According to Modi, India's "trade with the ASEAN region has nearly doubled, surpassing USD 130 billion" during the past ten years.³

India also plays a significant role in addressing regional concerns for the common good within the framework of the East Asia Summit (EAS). PM Modi's visit demonstrated how India's Act East Policy is mirrored by ASEAN member nations. It emphasised New Delhi's collaboration with partners and friends who have a shared outlook on the Indo-Pacific area. With its vision for the SAGAR project, which stands for Security and Growth for All in the Region, India has made East and Southeast Asia a priority.

Concluding Remarks

India's Act East Policy celebrated its 10th anniversary this year. Stronger people-to-people ties have given way to strong collaboration in commerce and investment, defence and security, and connectivity, including in fintech, heritage conservation, and capacity-building over the past decade. Important anniversaries of the founding of India's diplomatic ties with a number of nations in the region were also celebrated in 2024: the 75th anniversary with Indonesia, the 75th anniversary with the Philippines, the 60th anniversary with Singapore, and the 40th anniversary with Brunei.

PM Modi proclaimed that the 21st century is the Asian Century for India and the ASEAN region, highlighting the revolutionary effects of India's Act East Policy on relations with Southeast Asian countries over the previous ten years. In addition to being peace-loving nations, India and ASEAN respect each other's national integrity and sovereignty and are dedicated to a bright future for the next generation. They are also neighbours, fellow members of the Global South, and the fastest-growing region of the globe. In the face of international tensions, he emphasised the value of the partnership between India and ASEAN.

The need to preserve marine safety and security was reiterated by ASEAN and India. Exercise Malabar 24, which involved the fleets of India, the United States, Japan, and Australia (the Quad), was in progress in Vishakhapatnam at the time of the meeting. The exercise has repercussions for the Indo-Pacific region and is strategically significant in its own right. Modi also underlined that important sea lanes utilised for international trade are safeguarded by the Indian Navy. His idea of a safe and prosperous trading partnership with Southeast Asia aligns with his proposal for India to take on a larger role in regional security as a check on China.

On the fringes of the summit, PM Modi also held a number of bilateral meetings with foreign leaders, concentrating on strengthening cross-sector cooperation. Additionally, PM Modi had a productive conversation with Shigeru Ishiba, his recently appointed Japanese counterpart.⁴ The leaders reiterated their pledges to further fortify the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership by

means of increased collaboration in a variety of fields, such as infrastructure development, trade and investment, defence and security, semiconductors, skill development, culture, and people-to-people interactions.

All things considered, it turns out that PM Modi was quite successful in his diplomatic efforts to engage his counterparts on the sidelines, strengthening bilateral ties, and interacting with the leaders of the ASEAN bloc to further the interests of the entire region while taking into account India's contribution to regional peace and stability. PM Modi made the case at the summit for a collaborative strategy to address regional concerns, including safety and marine security, to uphold and respect international law, and to strive toward a rules-based global order. Additionally, this improves India's reputation internationally.

NOTES:

¹ Shubhajit Roy, "ASEAN Summit 2024: PM Modi unveils 10-point plan to strengthen India-ASEAN relations," *Indian Express*, October 11, 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-asean-ties-key-in-times-of-conflict-pm-modi-9614214/>. Accessed on October 24, 2024.

² Ibid.

³ "21st century is the "Asian Century," a century for India and ASEAN countries: PM Modi at ASEAN-India Summit", *New Delhi Times*, October 11, 2024, <https://www.newdelhitimes.com/21st-century-is-the-asian-century-a-century-for-india-and-asean-countries-pm-modi-at-asean-india-summit/>. Accessed on October 24, 2024.

⁴ Prapti Upadhayay, Ed., "PM Modi holds key talks with counterparts from Japan, New Zealand on sidelines of ASEAN-India Summit", *WION News*, October 10, 2024, <https://www.wionews.com/india-news/pm-modi-holds-key-talks-with-counterparts-from-japan-new-zealand-on-sidelines-of-asean-india-summit-766437>. Accessed on October 24, 2024.