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## INDIA - ASEAN RELATIONS : WAY FORWARD



**R Chandrashekhar**, erstwhile member of the Armed Forces Headquarters Civil Service (1978-2013) is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Joint Warfare Studies, New Delhi where his areas of interest are Civil Military Relations and India's interests in its neighbourhood.

India has a long historical, social and cultural relation with the countries that form the land mass that composes Southeast Asia. The first contacts between the people of Southeast Asia and empires of India are believed to have taken place between 50 B.C. and A.D. 100. Indian civilisation impacted the influenced various aspects of the social construct of Southeast Asia over several centuries, influencing the languages and scripts, beliefs system and art.

The mighty kingdoms that ruled the region – the Champa, Khmer, Langkasuka Kingdom, Kedah,

Srivijayan and Mahapajit all followed statecraft principles akin to those of India. The 'Indianisation' of Southeast Asia commenced from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD with trading settlements which became ports of call along the trading route from Southern Indian Kingdoms to China. There are today significant Indian communities in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and even Philippines – many of who are Tamil people, who migrated to the region over several centuries.

A start point to understand Indo-ASEAN Relations as they exist today would be



the launching of a 'Look East' Policy by the then Narasimha Rao Government in 1991, which aimed at greater economic alignment and an enhanced political role in the Asia–Pacific region in general and Southeast Asia in particular.

**The 'Look East' Policy:** The first phase of India's Look East policy was ASEAN-centred, and focused primarily on trade and investment linkages. Post the initiation of the Look East Policy, India first became a Sectoral Partner of ASEAN in 1992, a Dialogue Partner in 1996 and a Summit-level Partner in 2002. The second phase, which began in 2003, was more comprehensive in its coverage, with ASEAN as its core but extending from Australia to East Asia. It marked a shift in focus from trade to wider economic and security cooperation, political partnerships, physical connectivity through road and rail links. A factor underlying India's efforts is also the domestic imperative to develop its Northeast regions. A major upgradation of the relationship happened with the India becoming a 'Strategic Partner' of the ASEAN in 2012.

**The 'Act East' Policy:** At the East Asia Summit held in Myanmar in November 2014, the Indian Prime Minister unveiled India's "Act East Policy" to emphasise India's seriousness to boost ties with the region. At the centre of this 'Act East', with emphasis on Connectivity, Commerce and Culture as the focus areas of action for a greater ASEAN-India integration. This Policy takes into account the defining pillars of ASEAN community building process - the ASEAN

vision document ASEAN 2025-Forging Ahead Together, the ASEAN Master Plan for Connectivity 2025, the ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2020 and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration Work Plan III.

### **The Delhi Declaration of 25th January 2018**

The Delhi Declaration of the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit to mark the 25th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations held on 25th January 2018 under the theme of "Shared Values, Common Destiny" reaffirmed the commitment to guide ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations by the principles, purposes, shared values and norms enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), the Declaration of the East Asia Summit on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations, and the Vision Statement adopted at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit to mark the 20th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations on 20 December 2012; and supporting the ASEAN Charter.

The Declaration noted the cross-cultural exchanges and civilizational linkages between Southeast Asia and India over several millennia as a strong foundation for cooperation between ASEAN and India in an increasingly inter-connected world and acknowledged India's support for ASEAN centrality in the evolving regional architecture and its continued contribution to regional peace, security, and prosperity and to ASEAN integration

and the ASEAN Community building process, including through the support for implementation of ASEAN 2025.

**ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership:**

The ASEAN-India Relations were upgraded to one of a Strategic Partnership in 2012 to further strengthen and deepen the partnership for mutual benefit, across the whole spectrum of political-security, economic, socio-cultural and development cooperation and the further strengthening of relevant institutional mechanisms and broadening of the network between government institutions, parliamentarians, business circles, scientists, academicians, think-tanks, media, youth and other stakeholders, for the building of a peaceful, harmonious, caring and sharing community in the regions and timely implementation of the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity (2016-2020).

**Cooperation under the ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership:**

To further enhance high-level engagement and cooperation within the existing framework of the ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership and ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the ASEAN-India Summit, the East Asia Summit (EAS), the Post Ministerial Conference with India (PMC+1), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus, and other ASEAN-India ministerial/ sectoral mechanisms and continue to support and contribute to ASEAN integration and ASEAN Community building process,

towards the realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

**The ASEAN-India Delhi Dialogue:** Is a premier annual event held since 2009 to discuss politico-security and economic issues between ASEAN and India. Nine editions of Delhi dialogue have been held so far at New Delhi and has evolved to be a premier event for taking stock of global geo-political movements and their impact on ASEAN-India relations and making recommendations for future.

**Facets of ASEAN – India Cooperation**

The three pillars of the ASEAN-India engagement remain to be the “Three Cs” - Commerce, Culture and Connectivity. There are, in total, 30 Dialogue Mechanisms between India and ASEAN, cutting across various sectors.

**Political and Security Cooperation**

(a) Reaffirm commitment to work closely together on common regional and international security issues of mutual concern and ensure an open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based regional architecture through existing ASEAN-led frameworks and mechanisms.

(b) Reaffirm importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation and overflight in the region, and other lawful uses of the seas and unimpeded



lawful maritime commerce and to promote peaceful resolutions of disputes, in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and the relevant standards and recommended practices by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The Agreement included to support the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and look forward to an early conclusion of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC).

(c) Strengthen maritime cooperation through existing relevant mechanisms including the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) to address common challenges on maritime issues.

(d) Work together to prevent and manage accidents and incidents at sea and promote effective coordination between ASEAN and India in maritime search and rescue, in accordance with existing processes and practices, including those of the ICAO and IMO, as well as encourage increased engagement between research institutions on maritime issues and collaboration on

maritime education, research, development and innovation.

(e) Deepen cooperation in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, violent extremism and radicalisation through information sharing, law enforcement cooperation and capacity building under the existing ASEAN-led mechanisms. In addition, to strengthen cooperation and collaboration to combating other transnational crimes, including people smuggling, trafficking in persons, illicit drug trafficking, cybercrime, and piracy and armed robbery against ships.

(f) Support the implementation of the Langkawi Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates to promote peace, security, upholding rule of law, sustainable and inclusive development, equitable growth and social harmony.

(g) Reiterate commitment and promote comprehensive approach to combat terrorism through close cooperation by disrupting and countering terrorists, terrorist groups and networks, including by countering cross border movement of terrorists and foreign terrorist fighters and misuse of Internet including social media by terror entities; strengthen cooperation to stop terrorism financing efforts, and prevent



recruitment of members of terrorist groups; support efforts in targeting terrorist groups and sanctuaries; and take further urgent measures to counter and prevent the spread of terrorism.

(g) Work together with the international community to ensure compliance with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding counter-terrorism, and to note efforts on the negotiations of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) at the United Nations.

(h) Strengthen cooperation between ASEAN and India on cyber-security capacity building and policy coordination, including through supporting the implementation of the ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy, ARF Work Plan on Security of and in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

### **Economic Cooperation**

(a) Further strengthen ASEAN-India economic relations, including through the full utilisation and effective implementation of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, and intensify efforts in 2018 toward the swift conclusion of a modern, comprehensive, high quality, and mutually beneficial Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

(b) Cooperate for conservation and sustainable use of marine resources in the Indian and Pacific Oceans in accordance with international law, notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and address threats to these resources including illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, loss of coastal ecosystems and the adverse impacts of pollution, ocean acidification, marine debris, and invasive species on the marine environment.

(c) Deepen cooperation in the area of aviation under the ASEAN-India Aviation Cooperation Framework adopted at the 14th ASEAN Transport Ministers' Meeting in Manila, on 6 November 2008, including through the convening of air services consultations by the ASEAN-India Working Group on Regional Air Services Arrangements and the establishment of air transport cooperation on technical, economic, and regulatory matters between ASEAN and India. Establish closer ASEAN-India air links to promote tourism, trade, and enhance greater connectivity between ASEAN and India.

(d) Promote maritime transport cooperation between ASEAN and India, and encourage potential private sector participation in the development of seaports, maritime logistics network and



maritime services in order to create greater efficient linkages; and encourage ASEAN and India to continue discussions on these priority areas.

(e) Strengthen cooperation in the area of aviation and maritime transport and look forward to the expeditious conclusion of the ASEAN-India Air Transport Agreement (AI-ATA) and the ASEAN-India Maritime Transport Agreement (AI-MTA).

(f) Strengthen cooperation in ICT to enhance ICT policies, build capacity, improve digital connectivity, infrastructure and services, develop ICT human resources through the establishment of Centres of Excellence in Software Development and Training (CESDT) in some ASEAN Member States, encourage ICT start-ups, and explore emerging technologies for adoption.

(g) Further promote stable and sustainable growth for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), including through technology transfer, diffusion, adoption and adaptation as well as enhancing capacity building, technical assistance, distribution channels, financing facilities, access to innovation, and opportunities to integrate into the global and regional value chains, as well as utilisation of Project

Development Fund and Quick Impact Project Fund.

(h) Continue to enhance cooperation for ensuring long-term food and energy security in our region through strengthening cooperation in agriculture and energy sectors; work together to promote the development of renewable energy technology through international platforms including the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

(j) Continue to deepen sectoral relations in science and technology (S&T) through cooperation on the ASEAN-India Innovation Platform, ASEAN-India Research & Training Fellowship Scheme, and ASEAN-India Collaborative Research and Development Programme, in areas aligned with ASEAN Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation (APASTI) 2016-2025, including, among others, nano-technology, materials science and biotechnology; and enhance capacity building on S&T.

(k) Continue to collaborate in peaceful exploitation of outer space, through the implementation of the ASEAN-India Space Cooperation Programme, including launching of satellites, their monitoring through Telemetry Tracking and Command Stations and usage of satellite image data for sustainable exploitation of ground, sea, atmospheric and

digital resources for equitable development of the region, as well as explore cooperation in R&D in emerging space technologies such as small satellites, inter-satellite communications, satellite propulsion, and analytics for space data.

(l) Continue to promote private sector engagement and strengthen business-to-business relations, including through the ASEAN-India Business Council, and encourage trade events to promote brand awareness of ASEAN and India products and services to further broaden and deepen economic linkages. We also look forward to the establishment of the ASEAN-India Trade and Investment Centre.\_

### **Socio-Cultural Cooperation**

(a) Cooperate on the promotion of the civilisational and historical links between ASEAN and India by providing platforms for knowledge exchanges among policy-makers, managers, and the academicians concerned with tangible and intangible cultural heritage; intensify efforts to preserve, protect and restore cultural and historical symbols and structures which are of mutual interest in reflecting the ASEAN-India cultural and historical connection, including through India's proposal on mapping inscriptions along the Mekong river and organising

of conferences and activities on ASEAN-India Cultural and Civilisational Links.

(b) Encourage health cooperation in areas relevant to the ASEAN Post-2015 Health Development Agenda, particularly in the area of strengthening health system and access to care, as well as safe and good quality medical products and affordable quality medicines, including traditional and complementary medicines.

(c) Cement a stronger cultural link by promoting cultural tourism and further enhancing people-to-people contacts, through programmes such as Delhi Dialogue, ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks (AINTT), ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Lecture Series (AIEPLS), diplomats training courses, as well as exchange programmes for students, parliamentarians, farmers, media, and other youth programmes.

(d) Strengthen cooperation in education and youth sectors, in the form of setting up of English Language Training, Entrepreneurship Development and Vocational Training Centres, and granting of annual scholarships; such as Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) scholarships, ASEAN-India Goodwill Scholarship, Nalanda



scholarship, and explore the possibility of setting up an ASEAN-India network of universities, and encourage other University to University exchanges, including with ASEAN University Network.

(e) Strengthen ASEAN-India cooperation in disaster management and humanitarian assistance, including supporting the work of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) in the realisation of the ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN, One Response: ASEAN Responding to Disaster as One in The Region and Outside The Region and establishing close partnership between the AHA Centre and its Indian counterpart for better coordination in regional disaster management.

(f) Promote dialogue between government officials and relevant stakeholders of ASEAN and India on empowerment of women, the promotion and protection of the rights of women and children, the elimination of all forms of violence against them, and promotion of women entrepreneurs in line with the ASEAN-India Plan of Action (POA) 2016-2020, as well as support relevant ASEAN frameworks and mechanisms on these matters.

(g) Promote cooperation in environmental management

and climate change, including exploring cooperation to support the implementation of relevant strategic measures as outlined in the ASCC Blueprint 2025, priorities of the ASEAN Senior Officials on Environment (ASOEN), and the ASEAN Working Group on Climate Change (AWGCC) Work Plan 2016-2025.

(h) Enhance cooperation in biodiversity conservation and management, through exchange of knowledge and experience, conduct of joint research activities and capacity building programmes to address the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem degradation, including supporting the work of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB).

(j) Explore the possibility of cooperation in alliance building, networking and partnership between ASEAN and India in civil service matters, among others, training the civil servants of ASEAN countries for the purpose of supporting further integration of ASEAN community and implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

### **Connectivity**

(a) Enhance physical and digital connectivity in line with the MPAC 2025 and the AIM 2020 by, among others, availing of the US\$1 billion line of credit announced by India to promote physical infrastructure and digital connectivity.



(b) Early completion of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project and extend this Trilateral Highway to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam.

### **Other Aspects**

**Funds:** ASEAN Multilateral Division offers project-based financial assistance to ASEAN countries. Financial assistance has been provided to ASEAN countries through various Funds including the ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund, the ASEAN-India S&T Development Fund (AISTDF) and the ASEAN-India Green Fund.

**Initiatives for CLMV Countries:** India has been supporting ASEAN, especially CLMV countries under the Initiatives for ASEAN Integration, which include projects on Training of English Language for Law Enforcement Officers in CLMV countries and Training of professionals dealing with capital markets in CLMV by National Institute of Securities Management Mumbai, scholarships for ASEAN students for higher education at Nalanda University, Training of ASEAN Civil Servants in drought management, disaster risk management, sustainable ground water management etc.

**Agriculture:** Several Projects have been initiated for cooperation in Agriculture such as Exchange of Farmers, ASEAN-India

Fellowships for Higher Agricultural Education in India and ASEAN, Exchange of Agriculture Scientists, Empowerment of Women through Cooperatives, Training Course on Organic Certification for Fruits and Vegetables etc.

**Science and Technology:** In the S&T field, there are projects such as ASEAN-India S&T Digital Library, ASEAN-India Virtual Institute for Intellectual Property, ASEAN-India Collaborative Project on S&T for Combating Malaria, ASEAN-India Programme on Quality Systems in Manufacturing, ASEAN-India Collaborative R&D Project on Mariculture, Bio-mining and Bioremediation Technologies etc.

**Small and Medium Enterprises:** A Joint Working Group has been set up by India for progressing cooperation with ASEAN nations in the SME Sector. India has created a Project Development Fund that is equivalent to approximately \$ 75 million approx. towards the development of manufacturing hubs. A proposal to set up an ASEAN-India Innovation Platform through increasing the ASEAN India Science and Technology Development fund from US \$ 1 million to US \$ 5 million has been accepted to facilitate commercialization of low cost technologies, technology transfer and collaborative R&D projects.



**Space:** Space Cooperation is a strategically important sector of the ASEAN-India cooperation with significant implications for the future with ISRO is implementing a project proposal for the following:

- (a) Establishment of Tracking and Data Reception Station and Data Processing Facility at Ho Chi Minh City;
- (b) Up-gradation of Tracking Telemetry and Command (TTC) Centre at Biak, Indonesia; and
- (c) Training of ASEAN Personnel in Space Science and Technology at the Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific (CSSTEAP).

**New & Renewable Energy:**

The 1st ASEAN India Ministerial Meeting on New & Renewable Energy was held in New Delhi on November 7, 2012 which adopted 'New Delhi Declaration on Cooperation in Renewable Energy' which includes the following:

- (a) Policy and regulatory framework across countries for facilitating, promoting and mainstreaming renewable energy;
- (b) Facilitating finance

for renewable energy applications; and

- (c) Cooperation in research and development, technology transfer and resource assessment, including developing institutional linkages.

**Environment and Forests:**

The 1st Meeting of the ASEAN-India Environment Ministers held on September 6-7, 2012 post which a resolution had been adopted the "New Delhi ASEAN India Ministerial Statement on Biodiversity". An ASEAN-India Green Fund had been established in 2007 with US \$ 5 million to fund pilot projects drawn up to promote adaptation and mitigation technologies in the field of climate change. ASEAN and India are also collaborating on several projects on Climate Change and bio-diversity through partnership with IISc, Bangalore.

**Tourism:**

India-ASEAN cooperation in Tourism Sector is conducted through annual ASEAN India Tourism Ministers Meeting. The 3rd ATM + India meeting in 2012 signed a MoU on Strengthening Tourism Cooperation thereby making India the first Dialogue Partner to sign an MoU on Strengthening Tourism Cooperation with ASEAN. An ASEAN Promotional Chapter for Tourism (APCT) has been

established in Mumbai in 2011.

**ASEAN-India Centre (AIC):** At the Commemorative Summit held in 2012, the Heads of the Government recommended establishment of ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) to undertake policy research, advocacy and networking activities with organizations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN, with the aim to promote the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership. Set up in 2013, the AIC has been serving as a resource centre for ASEAN Member States and India, for strengthening ASEAN-India strategic partnership and promoting India-ASEAN dialogue and cooperation in the areas of mutual interests.

### **India's joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**

A major expectation from the ASEAN nations is for India to give an early consent to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a ASEAN-centred proposal for a regional free trade area, which would initially include the ten ASEAN member states and those countries which have existing FTAs with ASEAN – Australia, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea and New Zealand which account for almost half of the world's population, almost 30 per cent of global GDP and over a quarter of world exports.

The objective of launching RCEP

negotiations is to achieve a modern, comprehensive, high-quality and mutually beneficial economic partnership agreement that will cover trade in goods, trade in services, investment, economic and technical cooperation, intellectual property, competition, electronic commerce, dispute settlement and other issues. RCEP will provide a basis for more open trade and investment in the region. This will help address concerns about a 'noodle bowl' of overlapping bilateral agreements and derive additional benefits (eg. through supply chains) from regional liberalisation.

India's reluctance stems from the fear that dismantling of import tariffs, as is being pushed for by the ASEAN, means agreeing to allow duty-free access to Chinese goods. The Indian industry is apprehensive that this could lead to their own products being out-priced in the domestic market.

### **Conclusion**

The Delhi Declaration of January 2018, issued in the spirit of 'Shared Values and Common Destiny' is testimony to a call for fresher and stronger cooperation between the ASEAN countries and India. Though incrementally maturing to be a mutually fruitful 'win-win' relationship, there are some aspects that need focus upon if this trend is to be continue into the future.

Foremost is the expectation from ASEAN for India to sign the RCEP, an undoubtedly hard bullet for India to bite, given the short-term impact it would have through cheaper foreign, mainly



Chinese, goods coming into the Indian market in competition to domestic manufacturers.

Second, is the pace of progress on the India – Myanmar - Thailand Road connectivity, with the envisaged extension to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

Third, is the aspect that India's quest for re-establishing its historical, social cultural and economic linkages with the Southeast Asia region is more than matched by that of China. China too is a Strategic Partner of the ASEAN and has as many as 48 Sectoral Committees with ASEAN in comparison to India's 30 Committees. Transit lines of the Maritime Silk Route pass through most ASEAN nations with China seeking and committing funding for major projects under the BRI.

Fourth, while ASEAN remains the multilateral platform, each of the ten ASEAN nations also have bilateral relations with both China and India. They also have varying positions on issues that do not directly affect all of them. Internal factors, such as the ratio of ethnic Chinese population in Malaysia bring in their own dynamics.

Most important in present day context are the promises to back large projects that China holds out, under the BRI or otherwise.

Fifth, while presently, the 'benign' ASEAN-China and ASEAN-India relations can be concurrently pursued, a stage may come where factors such as the growing India-US Strategic partnership, place the trajectories of developments of each at crossroads, requiring ASEAN nations make a choice between collaborating with either. The deftness with which they handle such emergent situations, both individually and multilaterally, would be a diplomatic challenge for them.

Finally, the veneer of ASEAN-India Relations, particularly at present, is tinged with immense mutual bonhomie amongst their leaders. Good chemistry amongst them no doubt is a trust builder and facilitator to view each other's' perspectives through different prisms, yet, the harsh fact is that national interests would be the eventual determinant of decisions and positions taken on issues. The challenge for our diplomats is to draw up acceptable solutions that do not dilute or dissipate the prevailing 'spirit of friendship'.

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### **Centre for Joint Warfare Studies**

Kashmir House, Rajaji Marg, New Delhi-110 001

Tel. Nos : 011-23792446, 23006535, 3306538/9, Fax : 011-23792444

Website : <http://cenjows.gov.in>, e-mail : [cenjows@yahoo.com](mailto:cenjows@yahoo.com)