

# The 20 th ASEAN-India Summit:12 pillars of strength

[cescube.com/vp-the-20-th-asean-india-summit-12-pillars-of-strength](https://cescube.com/vp-the-20-th-asean-india-summit-12-pillars-of-strength)



On 7th September 2023, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 20th ASEAN-India Summit as well as attended the 18th East Asia Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia. The ASEAN-India Summit held several discussions and they aimed to further strengthen their relationship and work on the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and create a future course of action.

It was during this meeting that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed India's support for ASEAN's centrality in the Indo-Pacific domain along with highlighting its synergism between India's Indo-Pacific Ocean's Initiative (IPOI) and ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific(AOIP).[1]During this meeting, Prime Minister Modi presented a 12 point-proposal for the strengthening of relations between India-ASEAN cooperation, and they are as follows:

1. *“Creating a multi-modal connectivity and economic corridor which would help link the Southeast Asia, India, West Asia, and Europe.*
2. *India offered its services and guidance in the domain of Digital Public Infrastructure for the ASEAN partners.*
3. *A Digital Future between ASEAN and India was announced, and they aim of this fund is to make sure they collaborate and cooperate with one another in the domain of digital transformation and financial connectivity.*

4. *India also announced their renewal of support for Economic and Research Institute of ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) to act as knowledge partner for the improvement and enhancement of their relations.*
5. *Collectively cooperating in raising issues faced in the Global South era.*
6. *India extended an invitation to the ASEAN countries to join the Global Centre for Traditional Medicine which has been established by World Health Organisation in India.*
7. *Aim to work towards Mission LiFE.*
8. *India offered to share their experience in providing affordable and quality medicines to people through the initiative of Jan-AushadhiKendras.*
9. *India called in for the collective need to fight against terrorism, terror financing and cyber-disinformation.*
10. *India aimed for joint coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and invited ASEAN countries for the same.*
11. *Cooperating with one another for disaster management and related issues.*
12. *Enhance cooperation in the domain of maritime safety, security, and domain awareness”.[2]*

One must understand that Southeast Asia and India have a long-standing history of trade, commerce, cultural exchanges, and people-to-people interactions for centuries now. Geographically, Southeast Asia is placed in a middle of the two seas, Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, which inevitably makes ASEAN, 'the heart of the two seas'. In the present geographical context too, ASEAN can be called the heart or the joining point between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean which makes ASEAN, an extremely vital part of the Indo-Pacific. Indo-Pacific started off as an idea and construct which later paved the way for many countries accepting the Indo-Pacific Vision, Initiative, Strategy and so, eventually ASEAN also brought in their version of the 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' (AOIP). ASEAN has aimed to maintain its centrality and that makes ASEAN, a partner to look forward to. Though, ASEAN's centrality has faced many issues as many ASEAN countries have been bothered and arm-twisted by China in the South China Sea. In the 2023, India-ASEAN Summit, India yet again supported ASEAN's centrality which meant that India understands ASEAN's need to maintain centrality and by supporting ASEAN's centrality, India was also able to give a clear answer to China that China's bullying and arm-twisting wouldn't be accepted against ASEAN.

Further, one must look at the 12 points which were highlighted to increase the synergy between India and ASEAN from a perceptive of growth, development and dealing with issues for the future. ASEAN is situated in the centre or the heart of the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean which inevitably helps connect the major trade routes which is not only economically beneficial for every country's growth and development but also, create

opportunities for major investments by the creation of a multimodal connectivity would help and strengthen the relations between all the countries of the Southeast Asia, India, West Asia, and Europe.

Furthermore, one must understand that the proposal made by India to create a multimodal connectivity would help create an economic corridor between ASEAN to Europe with India and West Asia in the centre as connecting points. Southeast Asia is a major market and if this multimodal connectivity project is created than it would benefit not only ASEAN market but also, open by the European market to ASEAN, India and to West Asia and vis-a-versa. Michael Tanchum in his study *“India’s Arab-Mediterranean Corridor: A Paradigm Shift in Strategic Connectivity to Europe”* opined that *“India’s Arabian-Mediterranean (Arab-Med) Corridor to Europe is an emerging multi-modal, commercial corridor that could radically reconfigure trade patterns between the Indian Ocean Region, the Middle East and Europe by creating an arc of commercial connectivity spanning Eurasia’s southern rim from India’s Arabian Sea coast to Greece’s eastern Mediterranean coast.”*<sup>[3]</sup> Further, Tanchum highlighted that *“this new connectivity would be able to shape India’s strategic paradigm and also, help reshape the role of Eurasian economic order as the trans-Mediterranean maritime link from Haifa to the European mainland and this would help India’s goods ships would be able to reach the UAE’s ports which would inevitably help reach the major markets and manufacturing centres of Europe. And this route would also be an alternative trans-regional commercial transportation route to the troubled Chabahar-based International North-South Transit Corridor.”*<sup>[4]</sup> If Tanchum’s points are to be considered then, India can further extend the route to the ASEAN market and that would help in creating a multi-modal connectivity and economic corridor which would help link the Southeast Asia, India, West Asia, and Europe. Also, during the Summit meeting ASEAN and India aimed to review the FTA within a time bound period as it would be easier to do trade with the FTA in place.

India is a leader in digitalisation as its process of digitalisation has taken up great pace and the success story of UPI has taken the world by storm. India aims to help ASEAN with the Digital Public Infrastructure and create a future to build towards digital transformation and financial connectivity and these are in sync with the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 where they highlighted the “domain of digital innovation and spoke of supporting financial access through digital technologies, improving open data use and management, developing digital financial inclusion framework and also establishing an ASEAN digital data governance framework”.<sup>[5]</sup> Also, On the 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2023, India-ASEAN Digital Work Plan 2023 had been approved in the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Digital Ministers (ADGMIN) meeting where they spoke about *“capacity building and knowledge sharing in emerging areas of information and communication technologies like artificial intelligence in cyber security, application of IoT and AI in next generation smart city and society 5.0, sustainable data and transport network for future: standards and applications, 5G technologies for IoT and future trends, role of ICT in implementation of digital health and security protection and assessment”*.<sup>[6]</sup> Another effort made by India and ASEAN was seen in the year of 2022, when the ASEAN-India Friendship year was celebrated along with commemorating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the

establishment of the dialogue relations with ASEAN and elevated the Strategic Partnership to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership where they worked on the theme “synergy towards a sustainable digital future”.<sup>[7]</sup> In the digital era, India and ASEAN are working on some many domains, but there are issues like cyber attacks and cyber misinformation which also need to be dealt with.

According to the “ASEAN State of Climate Change Report (ASCCR): Current Status and Outlook of the ASEAN region toward the ASEAN climate vision 2050” aimed to look at the climate change context in the ASEAN region with special emphasis on adaptation and mitigation at the national, regional and global levels and also, find the gaps and potential areas of cooperation for regional development.<sup>[8]</sup> India has been actively working on climate change issues and brought out several initiatives like ISA, CDRI, LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) and OSOWOG.<sup>[9]</sup> These initiatives can be useful for the ASEAN countries. In the domain of maritime security, India and ASEAN aimed to cooperate in areas of maritime safety and security through confidence-building measures, coordinating and sharing on emergency response, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, search and rescue operations, early warning systems, countering piracy, armed robbery against ships, trafficking in persons and smuggling of drugs and arms, combating IUU fishing, sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources, marine biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, combating climate change, marine pollution, promoting green and efficient maritime transport, marine-based renewable energy and marine debris.<sup>[10]</sup> All the efforts early explain that India and ASEAN are serious about taking forward the maritime security and also, working on futuristic maritime requirements.

It can be said that given ASEAN’s importance in the Indo-Pacific domain, India has been making several efforts to be a cooperative and supportive partner to the ASEAN. Since, most countries are still developing in Southeast Asia, India helping and guiding them is a good sign as it paves the way for stronger relations and help build stronger partnerships for the future.

## Notes

[1] Ministry of External Affairs. 2023. “Prime Minister’s participation in the 20th ASEAN-India Summit and the 18th East Asia Summit, September 07, 2023”. <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dt/37070/Prime+Ministers+participation+in+the+20th+ASEAN+India+Summit+and+the+18th+East+Asia+Summit> (accessed on 8th September 2023)

[2] Ibid.

[3] Michaël Tanchum. 2014. “India’s Arab-Mediterranean Corridor: A Paradigm Shift in Strategic Connectivity to Europe”, South Asia Scan, Issue No. 14 August 2021, NUS. <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/South-Asia-Scan-Aug-2021-V4.pdf> (accessed on 8th September 2023)

[4] Ibid.

[5] Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025. <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Master-Plan-on-ASEAN-Connectivity-20251.pdf> (accessed on 8th September 2023)

[6] PIB.2023.India-ASEAN Digital Work Plan 2023 approved at 3rd ASEAN Digital Ministers (ADGMIN) meeting, 10 February 2023. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaselframePage.aspx?PRID=1898093> (accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2023)

[7] Ibid.

[8] "ASEAN State of Climate Change Report: Current Status and Outlook of the ASEAN region toward the ASEAN climate vision 2050". [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ASCCR-e-publication-Correction\\_8-June.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ASCCR-e-publication-Correction_8-June.pdf) (accessed on 8th September 2023)

[9] Ministry of External Affairs.2023. "Prime Minister's participation in the 20th ASEAN-India Summit and the 18th East Asia Summit, September 07, 2023". <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dt/37070/Prime+Ministers+participation+in+the+20th+ASEANIndia+Summit+and+the+18th+East+Asia+Summit> (accessed on 8th September 2023)

[10] ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Maritime Cooperation. <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ASEAN-India-Joint-Statement-on-Maritime-Cooperation-FIN-1.pdf> (accessed on 8th September 2023)

Pic Courtesy-Bank Phrom at unsplash.com

(The views expressed are those of the author and do not represent views of CESCUBE.)

Tags:



Gitanjali Sinha Roy.

Gitanjali Sinha Roy is Assistant Professor at O P Jindal Global University and is a Ph.D. scholar at the Department of East Asian Studies, University of Delhi with specialisation in Japanese Studies. At present, she is a visiting Monbukagakusho (MEXT) Scholar at the University of Tokyo. Her M.Phil dissertation was Role of Female Labour Force in Japanese Economic Development: A Case Study of Womenomics in Abe's Reform Strategy. Gitanjali is a graduate in Political Science (Hons) from Miranda House and completed her post-graduation from Lady Shri Ram College of Commerce in Political Science as well. Her interest areas comprise of India and Japan's Foreign Policy, Security Strategy and Diplomacy, India-Japan Relations: Maritime Security and Strategy in the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asian and South Asian Politics, Security Strategy and Diplomacy. Ms Roy had worked working with Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) as a research assistant. Gitanjali Sinha Roy is a Research Associate at the Centre for Security and Security Studies (CESCUBE) and apart from this, she is a Fellow at the Japan Division at CESCUBE