



# A Comprehensive Analysis of India-ASEAN Relations under the Act East Policy.

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## **Abstract:**

India's Act East Policy focuses a lot on the countries around it in the Asia-Pacific region. At first, the policy was thought of as an economic effort, but it has now become more focused on political, strategic, and cultural issues, such as creating institutional ways for people to share ideas and work together. India's relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is now a strategic partnership, and it has strong connections with each and every nation that makes up the Asia-Pacific region. This study examines the key dimensions of India-ASEAN relations, including political, economic, and security cooperation, as well as cultural aspects in the post-Act East Policy era. The article examines the impact of the Act East Policy on bilateral trade, investment, diplomatic engagements, and people-to-people interactions between India and ASEAN member states. This research paper presents an in-depth overview of how the Act East Policy is changing India-ASEAN relations. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the progress made, the achievements, and the areas that require further attention for enhancing India-ASEAN collaboration in the future.

## **Keywords:**

India-ASEAN Relations, Act East Policy, Political Engagement, Economic & Security Cooperation, Cultural Exchanges, Strategic Partnerships.

## **Introduction:**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) The organization was established on August 8, 1967, in Bangkok, Thailand, when the founding members of ASEAN—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand—signed the ASEAN Declaration (also known as the "Bangkok Declaration"). Today, the ten Member States of ASEAN. Brunei joined ASEAN on January 7, 1984; Vietnam on July 28, 1995; Laos and Myanmar on July 23, 1997; and Cambodia on April 30, 1999. On November 22, 2015, at the 27th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, a statement was signed by ASEAN leaders, officially establishing ASEAN as a community. ASEAN has grown into a significant regional organization, promoting political unity, economic integration, and cross-cultural interactions among its member states. India has made the Act East Policy a pillar of its foreign policy because it recognizes the strategic significance of Southeast Asia. The Act East Policy aims to strengthen interaction with ASEAN countries and improve regional connectivity. This in-depth research looks at the political, economic, and sociocultural facets of this vibrant alliance as it investigates the many facets of India-ASEAN relations under the Act East Policy.

In 1991, when Mr. P.V. Narsimha Rao was Prime Minister of India, he inaugurated the Look East Policy. India was unable to improve its position on the international and economic stage. At the time, India was having difficulty adapting to its state-controlled economic system and the changing economic environment. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced the "Act East Policy" in 2014, he gave the countries' economic, political, and strategic ties a new direction. It reflects India's commitment to expanding its strategic sphere of influence, fostering economic cooperation, and bolstering cultural relations with Southeast Asian countries. As part of the Act East Policy, India hopes to actively contribute to the evolving regional architecture of ASEAN, boosting the region's overall growth and prosperity. The ASEAN 2025 Vision, ASEAN Master Plan, and ASEAN ICT (Information Communication Technology) Plan 2020 In 2009, the ASEAN-India trade in goods agreements were ratified. The signature of these accords completes the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Over the past 50 years, ASEAN, a regional organisation founded on accords, has strived to ensure the region's peace, progress, and prosperity.

The comprehensive analysis of India-ASEAN relations according to the Act East Policy seeks to unravel the dynamics of this evolving partnership and assess its impact on regional integration and cooperation. By deepening political engagements, enhancing economic ties, and fostering socio-cultural exchanges, India and ASEAN strive to build a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region that benefits both their peoples and contributes to global peace and stability.

### Objective of the Study:

The objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of India-ASEAN relations under the Act East Policy. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To provide a historical background of India's engagement with ASEAN, represent the development of the relationship, and highlight significant turning points, agreements, and efforts that have aided in its growth.
- Analyze the political aspect of India-ASEAN ties, including high-level interactions, strategic discussions, and collaboration in regional fora, in order to comprehend the breadth of political engagement and its implications for cooperation and stability in the region.
- Examining trade and investment patterns, economic integration projects, market access, and the possibility for additional economic cooperation will help evaluate the economic cooperation between India and ASEAN member nations.
- Analyze the effects of cultural diplomacy, tourism promotion, educational partnerships, and the encouragement of reciprocal understanding and appreciation on the cultural and people-to-people relations between India and ASEAN member states.
- To examine the security cooperation and strategic partnerships between India and ASEAN member nations, emphasizing joint operations, information exchange, and initiatives to improve maritime security and regional stability in the Indo-Pacific area.

### Methodology:

This research has been performed using an analytical and descriptive research methodology. The qualitative research approach was used in this study. This article explores a comprehensive analysis of India-ASEAN Relations under the Act East Policy. The study has only used secondary data sources. The secondary information was gathered from relevant books, journals, articles, newspapers, and online resources. Various sources of secondary data include the Ministry of Commerce's online database and various Government of India publications. The information includes trade-related information as well as socioeconomic, military, tactical, and communication development indices for India and ASEAN.

### Historical Context:

Southeast Asia and India have exchanged cultural and civilizational ties throughout history. The advent of Indian religions, especially Buddhism and Hinduism, had a tremendous impact on Southeast Asia's cultural landscape. Indian cuisine, art, architecture, and other cultural aspects have permanently influenced the area. These enduring cultural linkages provide a solid foundation for current India-ASEAN relations. Geopolitical shifts and regional dynamics during the Cold War era had an impact on India's interactions with Southeast Asia. India was able to establish diplomatic ties with nations in the area, including the founding members of ASEAN, thanks to its non-alignment stance during the Cold War. The Bandung Conference, which brought together Asian and African nations in 1955 to promote peace, self-determination, and economic cooperation, was a significant turning point.

India's Look East policy, implemented in the early 1990s, represented a dramatic change in the country's relationship with ASEAN. By placing a strong emphasis on economic collaboration, political discourse, and cultural exchanges, this programme sought to build tighter links with Southeast Asia. The Look East Policy laid the groundwork for more extensive relations with ASEAN participants and prepared the way for the Act East Policy.

India's relationship with the regional bloc was formalized in 1992 when it joined ASEAN. This dialogue partnership served as a forum for ongoing discussions, exchanges, and sector-specific collaboration. It made it easier for India and ASEAN members to have political and economic cooperation as well as people-to-people contacts. India's announcement of the Act East Policy in 2014 expanded India's involvement with ASEAN. It was an improved and more proactive version of the Look East Policy, demonstrating India's commitment to boosting regional connectivity, boosting economic cooperation, and fortifying cultural connections with ASEAN members. The Act East Policy has significantly influenced the dynamics of India-ASEAN relations today. The past of India-ASEAN relations is important because it illuminates the persistent cultural linkages, diplomatic interactions, and policy changes that have led to the current cooperation. The historical and cultural ties as well as the diplomatic actions taken by both countries make it possible to conduct a thorough analysis of India-ASEAN relations under the Act East Policy.

### Political Dimension of India-ASEAN Relations:

The Act East Policy's political dimension of India-ASEAN relations includes all of the bilateral and multilateral interactions, discussions, and strategic alliances that have boosted political relationships between India and ASEAN members. This feature highlights the Indo-Pacific region's shared commitment to peace, stability, and regional cooperation.

- **ASEAN-India Partnership:** The relationship between ASEAN and India has developed over time and is now characterized by frequent summits, high-level meetings, and discussions. The yearly ASEAN-India Summits offer a stage for leaders to debate important topics, share opinions, and look for opportunities for cooperation. These summits have strengthened the political aspect of cooperation by fostering more mutual understanding and trust between India and ASEAN participants.
- **ASEAN-led Mechanisms:** India takes an active role in a number of ASEAN-led organizations and forums, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). These platforms let ASEAN member states and their

allies, including India, conduct political discussions, cooperate in security matters, and consult strategically. India's strong participation in these fora demonstrates its dedication to regional security, stability, and multilateralism.

- **Maritime Security Cooperation:** India and ASEAN members have placed a major emphasis on maritime cooperation given the shared marine boundaries and the significance of maritime security in the area. Regular combined exercises, naval patrols, and capacity-building programmes are carried out by the Indian Navy with ASEAN nations in an effort to strengthen maritime security, marine domain awareness, and disaster response capabilities.
- **Counterterrorism Cooperation:** India and the ASEAN nations have improved their counterterrorism cooperation as a result of their recognition of the terrorism threat's growth. The political side of the collaboration has focused on regular intelligence exchanges, cooperative training initiatives, and the sharing of best practices in counterterrorism. A key venue for improving cooperation in this area has been the ASEAN-India Workshop on Counterterrorism.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** With a number of ASEAN members, including Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, and others, India has forged strategic alliances. These strategic alliances entail more frequent political discussions, defense collaboration, economic linkages, and interpersonal interactions. They act as the political dimension's pillars, allowing for greater participation and coordination on regional and international topics of shared concern.
- **Regional and Global Cooperation:** India and ASEAN members have worked together on a variety of regional and international concerns, such as non-proliferation, disaster management, sustainable development, and climate change. Through their political interactions, India and ASEAN have shown their dedication to multilateralism, advancing a global order based on norms, and working together to solve common problems.

The political aspect of relations between India and ASEAN members under the Act East Policy emphasizes their similar values, interests, and strategic alignment. Regular conversations, involvement in ASEAN-led initiatives, cooperation on maritime security, counterterrorism efforts, strategic alliances, and regional and international engagements all help to fortify political ties and advance peace, stability, and prosperity in the area.

#### **Economic Dimension of India-ASEAN Relations:**

The Act East Policy's emphasis on the economic side of India-ASEAN relations draws attention to the expanding trade, investment, and economic cooperation between India and ASEAN members. Initiatives to increase regional connectivity, regional integration, and the Indo-Pacific region's economic potential are focal points of this dimension.

- **Trade and Investment:** Over time, trade and investment between India and ASEAN have greatly increased. The creation of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA) in 2010 was significant in accelerating trade. India and the ASEAN members have both taken steps to lower trade barriers, improve market access, and streamline trade procedures. The economic ties are getting stronger as efforts are made to diversify the trade basket and look into new opportunities for cooperation.
- **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP):** The RCEP agreement was signed in 2020 and includes numerous other regional partners in addition to India and the ASEAN member states. This all-encompassing trade pact seeks to boost investment activity, facilitate regional supply chains, and further economic integration. The RCEP offers a framework for increased economic cooperation and market access, which enhances the economic aspect of relations between India and ASEAN.
- **Connectivity and Infrastructure Development:** Important elements of the economic dimension are connectivity and infrastructure development. Initiatives like the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, the India-ASEAN Connectivity Summit, and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway are meant to improve the region's physical connectivity, trade, and investment. These initiatives encourage deeper economic integration and ease the flow of people, products, and services.
- **Investment and Industrial Cooperation:** India and ASEAN members have aggressively pushed for more investment and industrial cooperation. While India presents opportunities for ASEAN firms, ASEAN member states are enticing places for Indian enterprises to invest. The economic dimension has been impacted by joint ventures, investment promotion initiatives, and industry-specific collaborations that have increased synergies and competitiveness.
- **Economic and technological collaboration:** In a number of industries, India and ASEAN members have stepped up their economic and technological collaboration. Priority has been given to cooperation in industries like manufacturing, information technology, renewable energy, and innovation. Best-practice exchange, technological transfers, and capacity-building initiatives all help India's and ASEAN's economies grow and thrive.
- **People-to-People Connectivity:** The economic dimension also includes the promotion of tourism, cultural exchanges, and links between educational institutions. Increased tourist flows, student exchanges, and cultural festivals between India and ASEAN member states foster a deeper understanding of one another's cultures and stronger economic ties.

The Act East Policy's emphasis on economic cooperation and integration is reflected in the economic dimension of India-ASEAN relations. India and the ASEAN member states want to take advantage of the economic prospects in the Indo-Pacific region by fostering sustainable and inclusive growth through trade and investment, regional economic partnerships, connectivity projects, and people-to-people connections.

### Security Cooperation and Strategic Partnerships:

Under the Act East Policy, security cooperation and strategic partnerships between India and ASEAN members have been important in ensuring regional stability, addressing common security issues, and advancing maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. This dimension covers a range of programmes meant to strengthen defense relationships, encourage marine cooperation, and counter non-traditional security challenges.

- **Defense Cooperation:** Through regular joint military drills, high-level defense discussions, and capacity-building initiatives, India and ASEAN members have aggressively pursued defense cooperation. Interoperability and understanding between defense forces have been fostered by exercises like the ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). These programmes improve capability development, trust, and regional security.
- **Maritime Security:** India and ASEAN members have placed a strong emphasis on cooperation in this area given the importance of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. The ongoing efforts to preserve a secure marine environment include regular naval patrols, information sharing, and cooperative training exercises. India's "SAGAR" (Security and Growth for All in the Region) project highlights its dedication to maritime cooperation and security.
- **Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime:** India and ASEAN members are aware of the significance of confronting the terrorism and transnational crime threats that are becoming more prevalent. To meet these problems, cooperation in intelligence sharing, capacity building, and joint training exercises has been emphasized. An opportunity for cooperation and the exchange of best practices is provided by the ASEAN-India Workshop on Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** India has forged alliances with a number of ASEAN nations, including Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and others. These collaborations cover intelligence sharing, defense cooperation, and strategic consultations. They offer a structure for strengthening security ties, taking care of shared security issues, and fostering regional stability.
- **Non-Traditional Security Challenges:** Disaster management, cybersecurity, and climate change are just a few of the non-traditional security issues on which India and ASEAN members collaborate. Sharing of knowledge, collaborative training initiatives, and information exchanges all help the community respond to these challenges better. Platforms for tackling non-traditional security issues include the ASEAN-India Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management and the ASEAN-India Cyber Dialogue.
- **Regional Forums and Mechanisms:** India actively engages in two regional forums and mechanisms, the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). These forums offer chances for strategic discussions, confidence-inspiring actions, and security problem coordination. India's participation in these meetings improves security cooperation and strategic alliances with ASEAN participants.

Under the Act East Policy, security cooperation and strategic alliances are essential elements of India-ASEAN relations. India and ASEAN members seek to establish a secure and stable environment in the Indo-Pacific through fostering defense cooperation, maritime security, counterterrorism initiatives, and dealing with non-traditional security concerns.

### Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges:

In order to advance knowledge, develop relationships, and build cultural bonds between India and ASEAN member nations, cultural and people-to-people exchanges are essential. This area of India-ASEAN ties falls under the Act East Policy and includes a number of programmes designed to improve intercultural communication, tourism, educational exchanges, and cultural heritage.

- **Cultural Heritage and Festivals:** India and ASEAN members have a rich heritage of cultural traditions. Festivals and cultural exchanges offer a stage for showing and highlighting the differences and similarities in the two regions' cultures. The ASEAN-India Pravasi Bhartiya Divas and the ASEAN-India Music Festival are only two examples of cultural gatherings, exhibits, and festivals that have promoted cultural understanding and exchange.
- **Educational Exchanges:** To encourage academic cooperation, knowledge sharing, and the development of human resources, India and ASEAN members have placed a strong emphasis on educational exchanges. Scholarships, student exchange programmes, and collaborative research initiatives have all contributed to the growth of a trained workforce. These programmes support cross-cultural learning and the development of enduring relationships, which add to the cultural component.
- **Tourism and Interpersonal Connectivity:** Tourism is essential for fostering intercultural awareness and interpersonal connectivity. India and the ASEAN nations have taken steps to encourage tourism and ease cross-regional travel. Initiations like the India-ASEAN Tourism Cooperation and the "Visit ASEAN@50" campaign have promoted tourism, allowing people to discover the rich cultural legacy, important landmarks, and scenic natural beauty of both India and ASEAN.
- **Cultural Centers and Language Initiatives:** The establishment of cultural centers and language initiatives by India and ASEAN members provides crucial forums for advancing linguistic competency and cross-cultural understanding. Cultural events, language lessons, and artistic exchanges have been made possible by the ASEAN Cultural Centre in India and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). These programmes aid in the promotion and preservation of cultural diversity.

- **Intercultural Dialogue and Cooperation:** India and ASEAN members take an active part in cross-cultural discussions and cooperative projects. Platforms for interdisciplinary research, creative partnerships, and intercultural communication are offered via the ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks (AINTT) and the ASEAN-India Artists' Camp. Such interactions boost the cultural component of India-ASEAN relations and encourage a greater understanding of cultural diversity.

India and ASEAN members may better understand, appreciate, and be friends through cultural and people-to-people contacts. India and ASEAN member nations want to establish a solid cultural basis for closer and more significant ties in accordance with the Act East Policy through cultural heritage preservation, educational exchanges, tourism promotion, and youth involvement.

#### **Conclusion:**

The comprehensive analysis of India-ASEAN relations under the Act East Policy highlights the multifaceted dimensions and achievements of this important partnership. In this study, we find that ASEAN views India as an upcoming power in Asia and is keen to develop relations with India that would benefit both its member countries and the entire region. Under the Act East Policy, there has been tremendous improvement in all areas of India-ASEAN ties. The relationship has enormous potential for development, cooperation, and resolving local problems.

ASEAN-India collaboration has a bright future and a lot of possibilities. Right now, it is evident that both India and ASEAN are ready to establish a strong alliance with a long-term perspective. By implementing the Act East Policy, both parties are consciously working to forge connections that will further the mutual prosperity of India-ASEAN and the entire Asian region. By using the opportunities and overcoming the challenges, India and ASEAN member states can continue to strengthen regional ties and contribute to peace, security, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific, and building mutual understanding.

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