

Ministry of External Affairs

Indo-Pacific Division Briefs

Given the increasing salience of the Indo-Pacific concept in global discourse, the Ministry of External Affairs established a new Division for the Indo-Pacific in April 2019. The purpose for doing so was two-fold: to help consolidate India's vision of the Indo-Pacific across Government of India, in line with the elements set out by the Prime Minister of India in June 2018, and to provide substantive policy elements and programmes to that vision. Indo-Pacific Division deals with matters relating to the Indo-Pacific, India-ASEAN relations, East Asia Summit, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS).

Indo-Pacific

2. On June 1, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined India's vision for the Indo-Pacific region in his speech delivered at the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore. India calls for a free, open and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific, based upon respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations, peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and adherence to international rules and laws. India's concept of the Indo-Pacific is inclusive in nature, and supports an approach that respects the right to freedom of navigation and overflight for all in the international seas. India's Indo-Pacific vision is premised upon the principle of 'ASEAN-Centrality'. India's approach is based on cooperation and collaboration, given the need for shared responses to shared challenges in the region.

3. On November 04, 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI) at the East Asia Summit held in Bangkok, Thailand. As an open global initiative, the IPOI draws on existing regional cooperation architecture and mechanisms to focus on seven central pillars conceived around Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport.

4. On December 13-14, 2019, India hosted Delhi Dialogue-XI with ASEAN Member States on the theme "Advancing partnership in the Indo-Pacific" along with the 6th Indian Ocean Dialogue with IORA Member States on the theme "Indo-Pacific: Re-imagining the Indian Ocean through an Expanded Geography". Emerging architecture in the Indo-Pacific construct and maritime connectivity were key themes of discussions at both events. On February 6-7, 2020, India, in partnership with Australia and Indonesia, hosted the 4th East Asia Summit (EAS) Conference on Maritime Security Cooperation in Chennai. The Conference focussed on maritime security, maritime safety and the Blue economy among other topics, and brought together participants from EAS Participating Countries.

India-ASEAN Relations

5. India's relationship with ASEAN is a key pillar of its foreign policy and the foundation of its Act East Policy. India became a Strategic Partner of ASEAN in 2012, after progressing from its earlier roles of Sectoral Partner (1992), Dialogue Partner (1996) and Summit Level Partner (2002). Currently, there are 30 Dialogue Mechanisms between India and ASEAN, cutting across various sectors.
6. India's Act East Policy, which provides the guiding framework to take forward the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership to the next level, recognizes connectivity in its broadest sense as the key. Connectivity includes physical, economic, political and people-to-people connectivity.
7. ASEAN and India share land and maritime borders, which provides significant scope for enhancing connectivity through land, air and the sea. India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is an ongoing effort to enhance road-connectivity between India and the South East Asia. In a bid to realise the connectivity potential, in the 2015 ASEAN-India Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a USD 1 billion Line of Credit for connectivity and infrastructure projects in ASEAN.
8. India has a Free Trade Agreement with ASEAN spanning goods, services and investment. India-ASEAN trade and investment relations have been growing steadily, with ASEAN being India's fourth largest trading partner at US\$ 96.79 billion. Both sides have set the target of US\$ 200 billion by 2022. Investment flows are also substantial both ways.
9. India has launched a number of programmes and projects for capacity development and enhancing people-to-people connectivity. Exchange programmes for students, media personnels and farmers are the on-going initiatives. In September 2019, External Affairs Minister and Minister of Human Resource Development launched 1000 integrated PhD Fellowships for ASEAN students at the IITs.
10. Space project envisaging establishment of a Tracking, Data Reception/Data Processing Station in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and upgradation of Telemetry Tracking and Command Station in Biak, Indonesia; Setting up of Centres of Excellence in Software Development & Training (CESDT) in CLMV countries; Quick Impact Projects in CLMV etc are some of the other on-going projects.
11. ASEAN countries are emerging as the major tourist destinations for Indians. Out of 129 million foreign tourist arrivals to ASEAN in 2018, 3.45 million were from India. Celebration of the year 2019 as the ASEAN-India Year of Tourism was one of the many steps to enhance the two-way flow of tourists. Indian diaspora in the ASEAN region, which constitutes about 20% of India's total diaspora, plays a seminal role in strengthening India-ASEAN ties.

East Asia Summit (EAS)

12. Established in 2005, the Leaders-led EAS format is the most vital part of the ASEAN-led frameworks, primarily because of the contribution it makes to building an

environment of strategic trust in the region. The 18 members of the EAS represent 54% of the world population and accounts for the 58% of the global GDP.

13. As a nation deeply committed to strengthening the EAS as an ASEAN-led organization, India continues to contribute positively to the EAS goals. At the 14th East Asia Summit in Bangkok, Prime Minister Modi announced India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). On February 6-7, 2020, India, in partnership with Australia and Indonesia, hosted the 4th East Asia Summit (EAS) Conference on Maritime Security Cooperation in Chennai.

Indian Ocean Rim Association

14. Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is a 22-member regional grouping of countries in the Indian Ocean Region. India is a founding member of IORA that was established in 1997. The IORA Secretariat is located in Port Louis, Mauritius.

15. IORA has identified six Priority Areas (Academic, Science and Technology, Fisheries Management, Tourism and Cultural Exchanges, Disaster Risk Management, Maritime Safety and Security, Trade and Investment Facilitation) and 2 Cross-cutting Issues (Blue Economy and Women's Economic Empowerment) for regional cooperation. India is the lead country for Disaster Risk Management and Academic, Science and Technology Cooperation. India is also the cluster group member for Tourism, Maritime Safety and Security, Blue Economy and Women's Economic Empowerment.

16. India actively participates in various IORA events, and hosts various capacity building workshops and thematic seminars/conferences under the rubric of IORA. In November 2019, India hosted the second Somalia-Yemen Development Programme in Kochi, Kerala to impart fisheries policy-related training to officials from Somalia and Yemen. India also brought out the first edition of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Guidelines for IORA in November 2019. India regularly contributes to IORA's development corpus called IORA Special Fund.

Asia Europe Meeting

17. Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) is the biggest inter-governmental process between Asia and Europe, representing 60% of the world population, 65% of the global GDP and 55% of the world trade. It was established in 1996 as an 'informal dialogue' forum for countries from the two continents. It currently has 53 Partners – 51 countries and 2 regional organisations (ASEAN and European Union). India joined ASEM in 2008 as part of its second expansion process.

18. The highest level of interaction in ASEM happens at the Head of State/Head of Government-level, biennially. In the intervening years, the Foreign Ministers meet to guide the direction of cooperation as well as to discuss the various global political issues. Apart from these, there are sectoral Ministerial dialogues that occur from time to time, in domains like finance, education and transportation.

19. The 11th ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting was held in Delhi in 2013. Government of India delegates participate in various ASEM seminars/ workshop/ conference to further the connectivity between peoples of two continents. India has been organizing special courses of ASEM diplomats at the Foreign Service Institute for the last 5 years. Customs cooperation is another area in which India works closely with ASEM.

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)

20. MGC is a sub-regional forum in South-East Asia, launched in 2000 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. It was the joint initiative by six countries - India, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. Since its inception in 2000, 10 MGC Ministerial Meetings have taken place. MGC is celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2020.

21. The successful India-MGC Quick Impact Scheme, launched by India in September 2012, focuses on projects of short gestation period that can have positive impact at the community level. 24 projects have been completed so far, including 15 in Cambodia and 9 in Viet Nam. In addition, currently 11 projects in Cambodia, 4 in Vietnam and 3 in Lao PDR are under implementation. The scholarship schemes offered by India for the MGC partner countries have seen active utilization.

22. Another notable success in cultural connectivity initiatives is the establishment of MGC Asian Traditional Textile Museum in Siem Reap, Cambodia. Established in 2014, the Museum is doing significant work in preserving and showcasing the rich and vibrant textile heritage of the Mekong-Ganga region.

23. The 10th MGC Foreign Ministers' Meeting held on August 01, 2019 in Bangkok adopted a new MGC Plan of Action (2019-2022) which envisages project-based cooperation in the existing seven areas of tourism and culture, education, public health and traditional medicine, agriculture and allied sectors, transport and communication, MSMEs as well as three new areas of water resources management, science and technology, skill development and capacity building.

Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS)

24. ACMECS is a cooperation framework among the five countries in the Mekong subregion, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. It is aimed at achieving an integrated and connected Mekong community through realization of Seamless ACMECS (enhanced physical and digital connectivity), Synchronized ACMECS (enhanced trade, investment and financial cooperation) and Smart and Sustainable ACMECS (enhanced human resource and environmental cooperation).

25. In July 2019, India joined ACMECS as a Development Partner along with Australia, China, Japan, Republic of Korea and USA. India is working with Partners within the group to identify suitable projects from ACMECS Priority Projects drawing on the USD 1 billion Line of Credit announced by the Prime Minister at the India-

ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur in November 2015 for connectivity and digital infrastructure in the ASEAN region.
