1. 22nd India-ASEAN Summit – I R

The 22nd Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-India Summit was held in Malaysia. The Philippines set to take over the seat in 2026.

Key Highlights of the Summit

Reviewed progress in ASEAN–India relations and explored new measures to strengthen the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Marked the Prime Minister's 12th participation in the India–ASEAN Summit. Called for an early review of the ASEAN–India Free Trade Agreement (AITIGA) to make it more balanced and beneficial. Aligned with the Malaysian Chair's theme of "Inclusivity and Sustainability," **India announced new collaborative initiatives-**Implementation of the ASEAN–India Plan of Action (2026–2030).Adoption of the ASEAN–India Joint Leaders' Statement on Sustainable Tourism. Designation of 2026 as the "ASEAN–India Year of Maritime Cooperation. "Hosting of the East Asia Summit Maritime Heritage Festival at Lothal, Gujarat. Proposal to organize the Second ASEAN–India Defence Ministers' Meeting and the Second ASEAN–India Maritime Exercise to enhance regional maritime security and openness.

Overview of ASEAN

Established- 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand.
Founding Members- Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.
Current Members- 11 nations – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and East Timor.
Headquarters- Jakarta, Indonesia.
Purpose- To promote peace, stability, and regional cooperation during Cold War tensions.
Partnerships- ASEAN maintains dialogue partnerships with India, China, the USA, Japan, Australia, and the EU, among others.

India–ASEAN Relations

Evolution and Framework

Cooperation began in the early 1990s under the "Look East Policy," which evolved into the "Act East Policy" in 2014 to emphasize proactive engagement. The partnership reflects shared economic, strategic, and security interests, especially in response to growing regional complexities.

Milestones

1992- Sectoral Dialogue Partner
1996- Full Dialogue Partner
2012- Strategic Partnership
2022- Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

Trade and Investment

ASEAN is India's 4th largest trading partner. Bilateral trade reached US$110.4 billion in 2021–22.Between FY 2009 and FY 2023, India's imports from ASEAN rose by 234%, while exports increased by 130%, widening the trade deficit to about US$44 billion in 2023.

Connectivity and Cooperation

Major initiatives- India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway and Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project. Defence cooperation deepened through joint exercises and ADMM+ engagements. Cultural bonds reinforced via exchanges such as ASEAN–India Student Programmes and the ASEAN–India Network of Think Tanks.ASEAN remains central to India's Indo-Pacific vision under the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) framework.

ASEAN–India Free Trade Area (AIFTA)

Background

Framework Agreement signed in 2003.Trade in Goods Agreement effective since 2010, covering 76.4% of goods.Trade in Services and Investment Agreements signed in 2014. Benefits Created a legal foundation for liberalized trade, investment protection, and dispute resolution.Helped expand trade volume and investment flows between both sides.

Challenges in AIFTA

Widening Trade Deficit- India's exports have not kept pace with imports.

Limited Market Access in Services- ASEAN's restrictive policies hinder India's strength in IT, healthcare, and professional services.

Non-Tariff Barriers- Complex regulations and standards limit India's agricultural and pharmaceutical exports.

Rules of Origin Loopholes- Goods from third countries (like China) enter India via ASEAN routes.

Agriculture Impact- Indian farmers face competition from cheap ASEAN imports.

Negotiation Imbalance- ASEAN negotiates as a bloc, while India engages individually, reducing leverage.

Way Forward

Address Non-Tariff Barriers- Develop transparent mechanisms to simplify standards and compliance.

Strengthen Rules of Origin- Tighten criteria to ensure genuine ASEAN–India trade.

Promote Supply Chain Resilience- Collaborate in semiconductors, electronics, and critical minerals to reduce dependency on single-country supply chains.

Enhance Sustainable Cooperation- Focus on renewable energy, climate-resilient agriculture, and green technology ventures.

Leverage Digital Partnerships- Expand cooperation in digital economy, fintech, cybersecurity, and AI-driven innovation.

Balanced Trade Review- Ensure the revised AITIGA promotes equitable benefits across sectors.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/news/national/pm-modi-47th-asean-summit-virtual-address/article70204727.ece