

## ***India and the East Asia Summit***

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The Asian region has witnessed rapid and significant structural changes during the last few decades, experiencing the fastest growth in the world and has continued to lead global growth despite the two major debacles of the financial and economic crises in the 1990s and 2000s. However, the pattern of change has been uneven. On the one side, we see the modern and rising economies, which are contributing largely to Asia's economic development; on the other side, many low-income countries in the region have yet to undergo this process of structural transformation.

The prominence of the Asia-Pacific region in the global economy can be gauged from the fact that the region accounts for over half of the world's population with nearly 40 per cent of the GDP in Purchasing Power Parity, and about one third of world exports.<sup>1</sup> The continuing dynamism of the region is highlighted in the World Bank's East Asia Pacific Economic Update 2014, which points out that despite a challenging external environment, East Asia remains the fastest growing region in the world with its developing economies recording an enviable 7.2 per cent growth in 2013.<sup>2</sup> The International Monetary Fund's publication *Regional Economic Outlook, 2014*,<sup>3</sup> reported that the growth in Asia is projected to remain steady at 5.4 per cent in 2014 and 5.5 per cent in 2015. More importantly, the *Direction of Trade Statistics* shows that the region now accounts for about one third of global merchandise exports in 2013, up from about one quarter in 2011<sup>4</sup> signifying that the region has emerged as the prime mover in the shift in global trade pattern in recent years.

### **Broad Trends in East Asia**

The rise of Asia in the post Cold war years has been one of the most remarkable success stories of the century. Rapid and profound changes including the change and shift in power configurations, changes in the patterns of trade

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and finance, changes in political and economic landscape, etc. are driving the regional architecture in Asia. There was hardly any multilateral security arrangement during the Cold War as the region was covered by an American umbrella - mainly through bilateral arrangements of “hub-and-spokes” or the “San Francisco system”. Most of the bilateral security arrangements in the region were linked to the US like the US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security (1951), the US-Philippines Mutual Defence Treaty (1951), the Thai-US Joint Military Exercise (EX Cobra Gold, 1982), etc. All these arrangements preserved the US’ interests and those of its allies in the region. This was also to check the expansion of the Soviet Union and China in the region. Two multilateral arrangements that became unviable after their respective formation were the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) created as the region’s first multilateral alliance in 1955 only to be abolished due to internal tensions and absence of common concerns, and the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) in 1960 that was created as a cooperative security arrangement but failed to take off. The only regional organisation of the Cold War origin to thrive is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) created in 1967.

In the context of the evolving nature of the security architecture in East Asia, there was initial hesitancy in establishing regional institutions for fear that this might lead to some erosion of sovereignty. While bilateralism played a dominant role in the Cold War, multilateralism became far more significant in the post Cold War period. The region has been encountering major shifts since the end of the Cold War. The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 resulted in ASEAN countries appreciating and embracing their interdependence

### **Genesis of East Asia Summit and Developments**

The East Asia Summit (EAS) grew out of a desire on ASEAN’s part to expand dialogue and work toward creating a more cohesive community in the region by involving important external powers. The ASEAN leaders at the Tenth ASEAN Summit<sup>5</sup> took the decision to convene the first EAS at Kuala Lumpur in 2005, which was also supported by the Eight ASEAN+3 (APT) Summit at Vientiane on 29 November 2004.<sup>6</sup> The 2005 Kuala Lumpur Declaration established the EAS as “a forum for dialogue on broad strategic, political and economic issues of common interest and concern with the aim of promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia.”

The proposal for the EAS grew when the President of South Korea, Kim Dae Jung at the second APT meeting in Vietnam in 1998 for the formation of the East Asian Vision Group (EAVG), suggested exploring the formation of the East Asian Community. The EAVG, a Track II group that consisted of 26 civilian experts and representatives from the APT member countries released the findings of its study in the form of a report titled “Towards an East Asian Community: Region of peace, prosperity and progress”.<sup>7</sup> One of the recommendations of the report included the establishment of the EAS, i.e. the evolution of the annual APT into the EAS as a way to build the East Asian Community (EAC). The process was delayed by some senior officials of East Asia Study Group (EASG) due to the concern of some of ASEAN’s members about losing the initiative in the new mechanism.<sup>8</sup> The response to the proposal was cautiously positive. However, there were countries like China and Malaysia, which remained inclined to the APT framework and opposed to the membership of countries outside the APT. Japan on the other hand, expressed its desire for inclusive regionalism.

While the other members were in fear of China’s possible domination, Japan became the key advocate of the EAS and in order to help consolidate the new regional grouping, it pushed the idea of the EAS to counterbalance an ascendant PRC in the emerging East Asian regional organisation and pressed for invitations to Australia, New Zealand and India. It worked to ensure that the ASEAN remained central to any future East Asian Community and continue as the primary driver of the EAS.

In spite of all the bickering over membership, Malaysia hosted the first EAS in 2005. In order to avoid the region becoming divided in the conflict between the American and Chinese sides, rejecting Beijing’s offer to host the second EAS, it was decided then that EAS meetings would be hosted only by ASEAN member countries, making ASEAN the core manager of the EAS.

The EAS is a unique leader-led forum of the Heads of the state/government representing eighteen EAS member countries that make the ASEAN plus Eight, which accounts for more than 55 per cent of world population. Within the EAS framework, there are five priority areas- energy, education, finance, avian flu prevention/global health issues and pandemic diseases. ASEAN connectivity was added to the area of cooperation in 2011 at the EAS at Bali. Maritime security and issues of non-traditional threats were added later to the agendas of the EAS.

The first EAS affirmed ASEAN as the primary driver of the EAS and that the gathering would be a leader-led meeting. The region in 2005–06 was

facing fundamental challenges in the international scene such as terrorist attacks, the hike in oil prices, spread of the avian flu, the situation of Iraq and the Middle East, etc. The outcome of the first EAS led to the East Asian Declaration on Avian Influenza Prevention, Control and Response . During 2006–07, challenges such as poverty, energy inefficiency, avian influenza, the Korean Peninsula, natural disasters, etc. continued. The second EAS led to the announcement of the Cebu Declaration on East Asian Energy Security.<sup>9</sup> It was in this summit that India reiterated the support for the ASEAN's central role as the driving force for economic development in the region and agreed to launch a Track II study on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership in East Asia (CEPEA) and the Economic Research Institute of ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). The CEPEA is a regional trade cooperation and free trade agreement between the ASEAN and its dialogue partners. The ERIA was proposed by Japan in the second EAS and the members agreed to establish the ERIA in the third EAS.

The ERIA as an institute conducts comprehensive mapping of existing ASEAN+1 FTAs and bilateral FTAs, providing recommendations for policies towards Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The ERIA also contributes to the regional efforts for economic integration in wide ranging policy areas from trade/investment to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Human Resource development, infrastructure, energy, etc. The objectives of the ERIA include facilitating the ASEAN economic community building, supporting the ASEAN's role as the driver of the wide economic integration, contributing to narrowing the development gaps, and nurturing a greater sense of community in East Asia.

The EAS agenda expanded to include economic areas of trade and finance, for the first time moving away from the initial mode of dialogue process on security issues alone. Education became an important area of cooperation for EAS members since the second EAS and since then it has remained an important agenda. The third EAS was held on 21 November 2007 in Singapore. The summit adopted the Singapore Declaration on Climate Change, Energy and the Environment, which affirmed the commitment of the members to carry out collective action to address the challenges for mutual benefit and common good. The outcome of the fourth EAS included the adoption of two documents- Statement on Disaster Management and re-establishment of Nalanda University by India.<sup>10</sup> During the fifth EAS, the Hanoi Declaration of 2010 was issued. The sixth EAS held at Bali on 19 November 2011 concluded with the adoption of the “Declaration of the East Asia Summit on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations”. This

Declaration emphasised the role of the EAS as a Leaders-led forum for strategic dialogue and cooperation on issues ranging from political, economic, and security that are the major concerns of the region. Maritime issues figured for the first time in the sixth EAS. The US and Russia joined the EAS for the first time as members. The seventh EAS led to the signing of the “Phnom Penh Declaration of the East Asia Summit Development Initiative” on 20 November 2012 to support the ASEAN as the driving force in the EAS, to support its centrality in other regional mechanisms, and to enhance EAS cooperation in keeping with the principles of equality, partnership, consultation, and mutual respect among EAS participating countries.

It was initially believed that APT would simply evolve into the EAS, subsuming all of its work programmes and adopting its framework structure. This was the general understanding that prevailed until the November 2004 APT summit. However, the EAS became neither a substitute for APT nor a distinctly separate mechanism in its own right. The EAS embodies a more holistic regional concept in comparison to the APT as it confers non-ASEAN member states a greater sense of ownership over the East Asia regional community building process. One of the significant differences of the EAS from other regional forums or summits is its inclusiveness that allows any country from other regions to be a member of the summit provided it accedes to the three principles of the EAS. These were adherence to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), full ASEAN dialogue partner and substantial relations with ASEAN.

The EAS has expanded beyond the APT states and even beyond the geographic notion of East Asia in potentially including Australia, New Zealand, Russia and the United States. The EAS is broad based in its agenda and scope, encompassing trade, economics, security and social concerns. Unlike other regional forums in the region, the EAS has taken up controversial issues in its agenda. In 2011, the ASEAN decided to place traditional security issues on the agenda, as well as maritime security and non-proliferation. More attention was given to the disaster relief efforts in the aftermath of the Japanese tsunami, and flood in Cambodia and Thailand. Besides these regular priorities and agendas, the EAS also discusses and works towards issues of common concern. It includes cooperation on non-traditional security like terrorism, maritime-related threats, cyber security, trafficking in humans and wildlife, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction, etc. It also includes cooperation with other regional groupings like the G-20, World Trade Organization (WTO), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), etc.

### **EAS: The US Factor**

The debacle of the Asian Financial Crises in late 1990s and 2008 led the Asian countries to increase their political contacts with China in various multilateral settings, including the ASEAN Plus Three (APT), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). The US feared that Asia would turn to China's influence and domination of the East Asian region and this somehow led the US to engage in multilateral settings in Asia. According to the 2006 Wikileaks Document Release of the Congressional Research Service Report of the Congress,<sup>11</sup> US was not invited to attend the EAS nor did it play any role on the EAS process. The Bush administration indicated that the agenda of the EAS was not clear and that the support for APEC continued to stand as "by far the most robust, multilateral grouping in Asia."<sup>12</sup> Washington was supportive of APEC and ARF as it presumed that such forums could benefit the US more than the nascent EAS could. The US adopted the "wait and see" approach towards the EAS.

The decision of the US to participate in the EAS for the first time in Bali was a powerful symbol of a shift in American policy towards Asia. It was in July 2009 that the Obama administration ratified the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) with ASEAN by the Presidential decree. This accession to the TAC is the most speculated about because previously the US showed its disinterest, probably due to the informal and institutionalised arrangements of the EAS, which the US did not endorse, or probably with a view that since most other similar mechanisms had failed to make notable progress, the EAS too would not make a major breakthrough.

The participation of the US in the EAS reflects a significant shift in the American policy. From being inimical to embracing multilateralism in Asia, the Obama administration has moved on to placing ASEAN-led institutions at the heart of its foreign policy in Asia.<sup>13</sup> The participation of the US in EAS was seen as the most significant foreign policy challenge for the US in Asia; however, the forum has brought major players like China and the US to one forum and through this, a constructive relationship has been developed. For the US, participation in the EAS means promoting greater political and economic cooperation and enhancing security in the region. It is also seen as a useful tool in pursuing U.S national security objectives. With the US joining the summit, there was an apparent shift in the agenda of the EAS. The US added additional consequential issues that included the non-proliferation, maritime security, climate change and human rights, which never figured so strongly before on the agenda of the EAS. The U.S

broadened the EAS agenda, raising the traditional security agenda, that of the South China Sea issue. The US joining the EAS indicates unarguably, besides economic and political inclusion, to provide a counterbalance to the rise of China in the region.

### **India's Participation in the EAS**

This section of the article discusses about the likely role India is expected to play in the EAS and the expectation EAS has from India and vice-versa. The participation of India in the EAS is especially important in light of the expanding role and influence of the summit, which provides an opportunity to engage major countries, address shared concerns and work towards cooperation. Looking back, it was not all very cordial for India as far as membership to the EAS was concerned. The reservation to India's membership came from two members of the EAS, China and Malaysia, who opposed strongly to countries apart from the ASEAN and the East Asian region to become members. On the other side, with Japan's initiative, and support from Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand, India's entry into the forum for the first EAS at Kuala Lumpur was a success.

From India's perspective, the eagerness to support and be a participant in the EAS was underscored by clear strategic and economic motives. The fact that India is one of the major players, both economically and strategically, in the region makes it all the more important for the member countries of the EAS to focus attention towards India. With a population of 1.2 billion people in 2013, and with a GDP of US\$ 1.87 tn. In 2013, India was one of the fastest growing economies in the world.<sup>14</sup> India made significant improvement in increasing its trade with EAS members by engaging in regional and bilateral negotiations with its trading partner countries of the region.

India's participation in the EAS is a wider paradigm shift that characterises India's "Look East Policy" (LEP). Under the LEP, India has been pursuing a vigorous multi dimensional engagement with the ASEAN as well as with ROK and Japan. The sudden and dramatic liberalisation of the economy in 1991 established the framework for enhanced ASEAN-India trade that has grown widely to about \$80 billion in 2014. The Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) was established in 2003 between the ASEAN and India and in August 2009, the Trade in Goods (TIG) in 2009, and by December 2012, FTA on services and investment was concluded. This created an environment for the comfortable development of bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation. India has concluded some

of these bilateral agreements with the following countries: Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Republic of Korea and Japan, Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with Malaysia, continuing relations with the US, which remains one of India's major trade partner, and India-EU Broad based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) negotiations.<sup>15</sup>

### **Contributions and Progress**

Education has remained an important priority area since the second EAS process where the members resolved to strengthen regional educational cooperation by tapping the East Asia Region's centre of excellence in education and promoting the revival of Nalanda University, to improve understanding of the region and develop appreciation of one another's heritage and history, especially Asian. India has been the driving force behind the renewal of the Nalanda University. The Government of India established the Nalanda University in the state of Bihar by the Nalanda University Act, 2010 (no. 29 of 2010).<sup>16</sup> India expects to re-establish the university at an international standard while being Asian in tradition and concentration. Nalanda University figured in the EAS statement when the member countries of the EAS desired to establish an international institution where the concept of an Asian community would be advanced. This project was undertaken as a symbol of cultural renaissance to establish Nalanda as a great centre of learning that aimed to include mathematics, science, Buddhism, etc.

India has also taken the lead in giving support to three projects on harmonisation of national qualification frameworks to assure their interoperability, to facilitate student and people mobility in the region, the EAS regional leadership development programme and facilitating Technical and Vocational Training (TVET) teacher-student mobility. During the Brunei Eighth EAS Summit in 2013, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh urged, "... sectoral cooperation in education must be pursued with a heightened sense of urgency in view of its demographic and developmental impact".<sup>17</sup>

As far as cooperation on energy is concerned, India has been extending cooperation in strengthening energy security and improving access to energy in the EAS region. There has been notable progress in this sector with the initiatives taken by the US and other countries in the region and also collaboration of the ASEAN Centre for Energy (ACE), the International Energy Agency (IEA), and the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). It has been notified by India that the agenda on energy must



have inclusion of renewable and energy efficiency technologies quantitatively. This was proposed during the EAS Ministerial Meeting in Brunei in 2013.

The East Asia region is the most disaster prone region in the world. India has been contributing its expertise in Disaster Management and Prevention, both at a multilateral and bilateral level. In 2012, India hosted an “EAS-India Workshop 2012: Building Regional Framework for Earthquake Risk Management” in New Delhi on 8–9 November 2012, which was jointly organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). It adopted the Delhi Outcome on Earthquake Risk reduction in EAS Member countries.<sup>18</sup> This workshop was initiated with the hope that such initiatives would prefigure cooperation in responding to natural disasters in the region. As a follow up of the 2012 workshop, and under India’s initiative, the ministers agreed to establish a network of 24x7 Points of Contacts among the National Disaster Response Agencies of the EAS Participating Countries and a Virtual Knowledge Centre (VKC). Knowledge and best practices related to natural risk assessment, mitigation and response were shared and noted during the third East Asia Summit and welcomed by the ministers.<sup>19</sup> Along with the EAS members, India also supported and welcomed the establishment and outcomes of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian assistance on Disaster Management (AHA centre), the ASEAN Regional Forum Disaster Relief Exercise (ARF DiREx) and the ADMM+ Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, and Military Medicine Exercise (ADMM-Plus HADR & MMEx).

The EAS is playing an important role in strengthening economic and financial development in the region. India has contributed significantly and expresses support to enhance this priority at the ministerial level through discussions and cooperative work. India has been a key player in the trade negotiations between the ASEAN and its FTA partners. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is an ASEAN-led proposal for a regional trading bloc between the ASEAN and its six existing FTA partners indicating that the RCEP forms an important strategy of the government for lowering trade barriers and for securing improved market access in the region. The RCEP was launched at the seventh EAS in November 2012 at Phnom Penh. What RCEP aims to achieve is a modern, comprehensive, high quality and mutually beneficial economic partnership agreement that is expected to cover trade in goods, services, and investment, economic and technical cooperation, intellectual property, dispute settlement, etc.<sup>20</sup> Despite similarities with the region’s regional arrangements, the RCEP

is more open to external membership and has established firmly the centrality of the ASEAN, unlike some of the regional arrangements like the TPP and APEC's FTA that do not include all ASEAN members. India has remained engaged in the RCEP process. However, it is India's concern to identify if there is any useful East Asia specific agenda on finance.<sup>21</sup>

Prevention of pandemic disease like the avian flu and SARS, health care, etc. have been major priorities and matters of concern for the EAS member countries. India proposed during the 2013 Brunei EAS meeting, to host the "Roundtable on Tertiary healthcare with Focus on Trauma Care and Nursing" to explore future prospects of collaboration with the EAS. Concerted regional and global effort is required to cope with the challenges of diseases, healthcare and nutrition.

The sixth EAS in 2011 at Bali adopted connectivity as an additional area of cooperation in the EAS along with the other priority areas. As far as connectivity is concerned, India is taking part actively in all deliberations with the member countries of the EAS and has been reiterating the importance of connectivity as a matter of strategic priority for India in all its dimensions: physical, institutional and people-to people. India expects that through connectivity, openness and global economic integration, increased commerce, contact and cooperation between India and EAS member countries will be widened. A great sense of urgency is emphasised in terms of priorities regarding the implementation of the sixth East Asia Summit Declaration on ASEAN Connectivity. To highlight the significance of connectivity, the eighth EAS welcomed the initiative to convene the Symposium, "Towards Realization of the ASEAN Connectivity Plus: Moving Forward with ASEAN-India Connectivity" in November 2013 in Bangkok, Thailand.<sup>22</sup> This symposium highlighted speedy implementation of high priority projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, the Mekong-India Economic Corridor, highway extensions to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam.

Maritime security is one of the issues taken up very seriously at the EAS meetings. To maintain a stable maritime environment and to protect the maritime commons, the EAS has added maritime as one of the crucial agendas of the EAS. India attended the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) that works in conjunction with the ASEAN and EAS members. The EAMF was created to intensify the cooperation among the members and to collectively resolve the challenges faced at sea. India has cooperated in a bilateral and multilateral manner to enhance cooperation in promoting maritime cooperation including combating piracy, robbery at sea, etc. India

has collectively committed to abide by and implement the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and the adoption of a code of conduct in the South China Sea based on consensus. In accordance with principles of international law, India has reiterated its support for freedom of navigation and other maritime rights.

The EAS is expected to be an integral part of the evolving regional architecture that lets in other mutually reinforcing processes such as ASEAN-1, ASEAN+3, the ASEAN regional Forum (ARF), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+). India considers maintaining a strong relationship with the ASEAN vis-à-vis the EAS.

### **Future Direction of East Asia Summit**

The East Asia region faces formidable challenges including the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, the issue of the South China Sea, increasing threats that are non-traditional. ASEAN has to face these challenges confronting the region, retain its centrality, and keep the unity of the region intact despite the fact that the region faces fundamental challenges that are being affected by the political, economic and strategic domains.

The EAS should ensure that the initiatives taken up by the Heads of the State and Foreign Ministers are strengthened. Proper cooperation with the existing regional architectures in the region like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+), etc. should be maintained. Each summit meeting is expected to take up issues that are constructive and beneficial for the members and deliver tangible outcomes that will allow the EAS process to evolve. All external powers should support the ASEAN in its endeavour towards community building and regional cooperation.

As the EAS completes ten years of its existence this year, India expects to enter into a more holistic cooperation with the EAS. Apart from economic ties, greater cooperation on the challenges of human resource development, renewable energy, transportation infrastructure, public health and scientific research are some of the potential but crucial areas where greater efforts from the stakeholders and respective governments are required. For India, it may also imply that it needs to act fast and in a comprehensive way, if it wishes to engage in the EAS forum to use it as a part of a wider platform to cause a paradigm shift towards "Act East" from its usual "Look East."

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## Notes

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- <sup>10</sup> Nalanda is a Buddhist institution on an ancient site in India in the state of Bihar. It is the oldest university founded in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D, also known as the first residential international university in the world.
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<sup>20</sup> n. 17.

<sup>21</sup> n. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Mission of Japan to ASEAN, Symposium on "Towards Realization of the ASEAN Connectivity Plus: Moving Forward with the ASEAN-India Connectivity," 05 December 2013, [Online: web] Accessed 14 August 2014 URL: [http://www.asean.emb-japan.go.jp/release13\\_47.html](http://www.asean.emb-japan.go.jp/release13_47.html).

