

India-Thailand Relations

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India-Thailand Relations: Strategic Partnership

Context:

- In recent years, India has focused on enhancing its ties with Southeast Asian nations under the '**Act East Policy**', while Thailand has deepened its '**Act West Policy**' — creating a natural strategic alignment between the two.
 - In this backdrop, the India-Thailand relationship was recently **elevated to the Strategic Partnership level**, marking a significant expansion in bilateral cooperation across sectors.
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Pillars of India-Thailand Relations

1. Diplomatic Relations:

- Formal diplomatic ties were established in **1947**.
- In **2022**, both nations celebrated **75 years of diplomatic relations**.

2. Institutional Dialogue Mechanisms:

- Structured dialogues include:
 - Joint Working Groups on **Security Cooperation, Education, Visa and Consular Matters**.
 - Joint Task Force on **Maritime Cooperation**.
- These platforms enable regular discussions on bilateral and global developments.

3. Regional and Sub-regional Cooperation:

- India and Thailand collaborate through multiple forums:
 - **ASEAN, East Asia Summit (EAS), BIMSTEC, MGC, ACD, IORA, ACMECS.**

4. Policy Synergy:

- Thailand's '**Act West**' Policy complements India's '**Act East Policy**', enhancing strategic convergence.

5. Trade and Economic Partnership:

- Thailand ranks as **India's 4th largest trading partner** within ASEAN.
- Bilateral trade reached **USD 14.94 billion in FY 2023-24.**

6. Defence Cooperation:

- A dedicated **MoU on Defence Cooperation** was signed on **25 January 2012.**
- Focus areas include joint exercises, training, and maritime collaboration.

7. Cultural Cooperation:

- The **Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre** was set up in Bangkok in **2009.**
- Regular exchanges of cultural troupes, Indian films, food, and festivals strengthen people-to-people ties.

8. Educational Linkages:

- An MoU on education was signed in **2005.**
- India annually offers around **75 scholarships** to Thai students under various schemes.

9. Indian Diaspora:

- The Indian-origin population in Thailand is estimated to be around **4 to 5 lakh**, including **25,000 NRIs**.
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Recent Developments in Bilateral Relations

1. High-Level Political Engagements:

- Leaders met during the **44th and 45th ASEAN Summits**.
- The Thai Foreign Minister visited India for the **Raisina Dialogue**.
- Parliamentary exchanges continued at the **149th IPU Assembly** (Geneva, 2024).

2. Economic & Technological Cooperation:

- Focus on emerging sectors like:
 - **Electric Vehicles, Digital Payments, Fintech, Space Technology, Circular Economy.**

3. Review of ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA):

- Both sides have committed to revising AITIGA by the end of **2025** to make it more user-friendly.

4. Connectivity Initiatives:

- At the **6th BIMSTEC Summit (Bangkok, 2025)**, both sides emphasized:
 - Accelerated **Motor Vehicles Agreement** implementation.
 - Strengthening **coastal shipping** and **port-to-port linkages**.

5. Digital Cooperation:

- MoU signed for collaboration on **digital technologies**.

6. Cultural Milestones:

- Release of a **commemorative coin** for Guru Nanak Dev Ji's **550th birth anniversary**.
- Launch of Thai translation of **Thirukkural**.
- **Holy Relics of Lord Buddha** were sent to Thailand for public exposition in **2024**.

7. Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP):

- The CEP for **2022-2027** was signed to enhance bilateral cultural ties.

8. International Ramayana Festival:

- Indian dance troupe led by **Ananda S Jayant** performed at the festival in Bangkok.

Strategic Significance of the Partnership

- The Strategic Partnership aims to:
 - Broaden cooperation in **defence, cyber security, trade, investment, renewable energy, education, tourism, and people-to-people contacts**.
 - Enhance India's access to the **ASEAN heartland** through Thailand, facilitating **Indo-Pacific cooperation**.
 - Strengthen **regional stability** via active participation in **ASEAN, BIMSTEC, IORA, and MGC**.
 - Foster **economic integration** to mitigate the impact of global uncertainties.
 - Counter the growing influence of **China in the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia** through deeper maritime collaboration.
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Challenges in India-Thailand Relations

1. Trade Imbalance:

- India continues to face a **significant trade deficit**.
- Calls for:
 - Wider market access for **Indian agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and services**.
 - Exploring **local currency-based trade mechanisms**.

2. Connectivity Project Delays:

- Infrastructure and political uncertainties — particularly in **Myanmar** — have slowed progress on key initiatives like the **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway**.

3. Regulatory Barriers:

- Lack of alignment in **standards and certifications** hampers smoother economic integration.

The Way Forward

- Timely execution of the **Joint Plan of Action** is crucial.
- Expand collaboration in **defence technology, joint production**, and knowledge sharing.
- Prioritize the reduction of **non-tariff barriers** and streamline **regulatory standards**.
- Diversify the trade basket to reduce dependency on select commodities.
- Foster **private sector engagement, academic collaboration**, and enhanced **youth exchange programs**.
- Deepen maritime cooperation for a stable and secure **Indo-Pacific region**.