

India's Act East Policy in the second decade: perspectives from ASEAN and India

27 February 2025 | Auditorium, ISIS Malaysia

As India's Act East Policy (AEP) enters its second decade, New Delhi is seeking to reinvigorate its strategic ties with Southeast Asia, reflecting the current geopolitical realities and dynamic international order. While India's regional engagement has gained substance and momentum over the course of its Act East efforts, there is scope for India to improve its outreach and engagement in Southeast Asia via AEP.

This roundtable is focused on understanding how India consciously shapes its AEP in the next decade and its implications for Southeast Asia. Discussions will focus on AEP's evolution and significance, how it shapes India's trade and economic relations with the region and its importance in addressing climate change and promoting sustainable development.

Programme

0815-0900

Registration

0900-0920

Welcoming remarks

Datuk Prof Dr Mohd Faiz Abdullah

Chairman

Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS)

Malaysia

HE Shri B.N. Reddy

High Commissioner of India to Malaysia

0920-0930

MoU signing between ISIS Malaysia and Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and photography

0930-1000

Break

1000-1030

Presentation: 'Making the Malaysia-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership work' by Yanitha Meena Louis and Jaideep Singh

1030-1145

Session 1 – Act East Policy beyond 10: reinventing India-ASEAN ties in the Indo-Pacific

As the Act East Policy (AEP) enters its second decade, India's relations with ASEAN and its member states take centre stage. Since 2014, AEP has deepened India's strategic engagement with Southeast Asia but there is room for more sustainable and meaningful cooperation aligned with current geopolitical realities. As the core of India's Indo-Pacific aspirations, AEP remains pivotal to India-ASEAN relations. However, the past decade shows that India's role in the region is still evolving, reliant on political will and consistent engagement. What aspects of AEP need to be strengthened to shape India's terms of engagement with ASEAN and its member states? How will AEP shape India's role in the Indo-Pacific in the new decade?

Moderator : **Yanitha Meena Louis**

Analyst

ISIS Malaysia

Speakers :

Dr Shristi Pukhrem

Deputy Director (Academics & Research)

India Foundation

Dr Ton Sinh Thanh

Senior Lecturer

Faculty of International Politics and Diplomacy

Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam

Prof Dr Ravichandran Moorthy
Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

1145-1200

Break

1200-1315

Session 2 – Acting on Act East: leveraging on economic potentials

ASEAN and India have significant potential to deepen economic ties, given their proximity, market size and institutional history. However, in practice, ASEAN-India economic linkages remain suboptimal, even with a free trade agreement and Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in place. Total two-way trade is less than US\$100 billion, with India's share of ASEAN trade stagnating at 2-3% since the 2010s – ranking it second to last among ASEAN's CSPs. With the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement up for renewal this year, the time is ripe to rethink the way forward for economic relations. What barriers must be addressed to unlock potential? Which economic sectors should be prioritised to boost integration into global value chains? How can regional trade and industrial policies be aligned better to strengthen cooperation?

Moderator : **Jaideep Singh**
Analyst
ISIS Malaysia

Speakers : **Apurv Kumar Mishra**
Consultant
Economic Advisory Council to The Prime Minister
India

Neil Irwin S Moreno
Supervising Research Specialist
Philippine Institute for Development Studies

Prof Dr Evelyn S Devadason
Faculty of Business & Economics
Universiti Malaya

1315-1430

Lunch

1430-1545

Session 3 – Acting East and acting green: India-ASEAN collaboration on climate action and Global South resilience

India and ASEAN are uniquely positioned to lead the Global South in addressing climate change through equitable transitions and enhanced resilience. Yet, despite frameworks like the ASEAN-India Green Fund, the partnership's full potential remains untapped. With rising global attention on net-zero targets and climate finance, how can India and ASEAN advocate for the Global South's right to development while remaining committed to international obligations? What role can collective action play in advancing adaptation strategies, strengthening resilience and ensuring fair access to funding for loss and damage? What lessons can India and ASEAN draw from their shared challenges to craft a unified stance against inequitable global climate policies?

Moderator : **Zayana Zaikariah**
Researcher
ISIS Malaysia

Speakers : **Shuva Raha**
Fellow and Lead – International Cooperation
Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)
India

Meenakshi Raman
Head of Programmes
Third World Network
Malaysia

Dr Mirza Huda
Lead Researcher
ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute
Singapore

1545-1600

Closing remarks

Thomas Daniel
Senior Fellow
ISIS Malaysia

1600

End

Profiles



Datuk Prof Dr Mohd Faiz Abdullah

ISIS Malaysia Chairman

Prof Faiz leads the institute's policy development and Track-Two diplomacy, including through the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) and Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC). He is also the Malaysian representative to the ASEAN Regional Forum Experts and Eminent Persons (ARF EEP) meeting and co-chair of CSCAP. His diverse career spans media, law enforcement, education, corporate law and public interest litigation, as well as strategic and international affairs advisory to federal and state governments. He is the founding dean of Selangor Business School (UNISEL) and author of books on jurisprudence, public policy and strategic management.



HE Shri B.N. Reddy

High Commissioner of India to Malaysia

HE Reddy belongs to the 1993 batch of the Indian Foreign Service. He has had varied experience of diplomatic assignments, having served in Indian Missions in Indonesia, (1995-1998); Lao PDR, (1998-2002); the US, (2005-2008); Malaysia, (2008-2011); Switzerland, (2013-2016) and Nigeria, (2017-2018). He was the Chef de Cabinet in the Office of Minister for External Affairs from 2011 to May 2013, and headed the International Cooperation Division in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas from February 2019 to September 2021. Shri Reddy did his intermediate schooling at Andhra Loyola College, graduated from BITS Pilani in 1987 in Mechanical Engineering and MTech (Thermal Engineering) from IIT, Mumbai in 1991.



Apurv Kumar Mishra

Consultant
Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister
India

Apurv is a former policy leader fellow at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, and senior research fellow at India Foundation, where he led initiatives related to Indian foreign policy. He is the editor-in-chief of *India Law Journal*. Apurv is also a founding member of Robin Hood Army – a voluntary organisation of young professionals and students working to obtain surplus food from restaurants and sharing it with the less fortunate in more than 350 cities.



Prof Evelyn S Devadason

Faculty of Business & Economics
Universiti Malaya (UM)

Dr Evelyn is the former head of the Centre for Latin American Studies and deputy dean at UM. Her research focuses on international trade and regional integration. She sits on the board of the East Asian Economic Association and serves as the Malaysian representative to the Pacific Trade and Development international steering committee. She is an associate editor of the *International Journal of Social Economics* and *Asian Economic Journal* and a member of the editorial boards of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* and *International Journal of Rural Management*.



Jaideep Singh

Analyst
ISIS Malaysia

Jaideep is part of the Economics, Trade and Regional Integration team with more than five years' experience in economic policy planning and analysis. His work focuses on industrial and trade policy, including their interplay in geoeconomics. His work has been featured in Brookings, *The Diplomat*, *South China Morning Post*, Lowy Institute's *The Interpreter* and *The Edge*. He is a former Overseas Development Institute fellow in Zanzibar, Tanzania, and special officer to the deputy investment, trade and industry minister.



Meenakshi Raman

Head of Programmes
Third World Network (TWN)
Malaysia

Meena is a public interest lawyer and expert on climate change negotiations, having attended around 17 COPs and co-authored a book published by TWN entitled *A Clash of Climate Change Paradigms*. She also served as the first active observer from developing countries on the board of the Green Climate Fund.



Dr Mirza Huda

Lead Researcher
ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute
Singapore

Dr Mirza is attached to the climate change in Southeast Asia programme, working on energy, climate change and natural resource governance. In 2023, he led one of the first independent studies on the Laos-Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore Power Integration Project (LTMS-PIP), which used more than 30 interviews with policymakers and GIS mapping to examine the implications of the 'pathfinder' project on the ASEAN power grid. Prior to joining ISEAS, he worked on energy transition issues in Central Asia and South Asia at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Nanyang Technological University.



Neil Irwin S Moreno

Supervising Research Specialist
Philippine Institute for Development Studies

Moreno is a former research associate at the Department of Trade and Industry of the Philippines. His research interests include international trade and regional integration, industrial development and innovation.



Dr Shristi Pukhrem

Deputy Director (Academics & Research)
India Foundation

Dr Shristi is a former researcher at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis. Her research areas cover India-ASEAN relations, India's bilateral relations with Southeast Asia and the Act-East Policy with a larger focus on the Indo-Pacific region. She is a 2022 US Department of State international visitor leadership programme Quad fellow and a non-resident fellow at India Studies Centre, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand.



Prof Ravichandran Moorthy

Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Dr Ravichandran teaches international relations at the Research Centre for History, Politics and International Affairs. He specialises in Southeast Asian, South Asian and Indian Ocean geopolitics. His most recent book is *Emerging Dynamics in Contemporary Malaysia-India Relations* and the volume, *ASEAN Community: Challenges to Regional Integration*, will be published in mid-2025. He is a regular participant in seminars and conferences in the Asia-Pacific, especially in India and Pakistan.



Shuva Raha

Fellow and Lead – International Cooperation
Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)
India

Shuva leads CEEW's international cooperation programme spanning five regions - Asia-Oceania, West Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, and is part of the CEO's foresight team. Her portfolio includes energy and resource security, low-carbon growth, finance, climate resilience, nexus challenges and global governance. She anchors CEEW's advisory to multilaterals like G20, Quad, BRICS and UN. She is also a Global Solutions fellow and has been a UNFCCC COP observer since 2016.



Thomas Daniel

Senior Fellow
ISIS Malaysia

Thomas is with the Foreign Policy and Security Studies team, with a decade's experience in foreign policy and security analysis. His work focuses on how major-power dynamics impact on the strategic-security considerations of Southeast Asia. Within this scope, he mainly looks at the South China Sea dispute, political-security cohesion within ASEAN and Malaysia's security and foreign policies. He also focuses on policies towards refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia and ASEAN's response to the Myanmar crisis. His commentaries and views have been featured in the *Financial Times*, Associated Press, Al Jazeera, *South China Morning Post*, ABC Radio, Bloomberg, Astro Awani and Channel News Asia.



HE Dr Ton Sinh Thanh

Senior Lecturer
Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV)

Dr Thanh is attached to the Faculty of International Politics and Diplomacy, DAV. His research focuses on international negotiations, diplomacy, border and territorial issues, regionalism, cooperation and rivalry in Asia-Pacific, ASEAN studies and Vietnam-India relations. He is a former ambassador to India, concurrently to Nepal and Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. He is the author of *International Negotiation Textbook and Regional Cooperation in Asia: the Role of ASEAN and India*.



Yanitha Meena Louis

Analyst
ISIS Malaysia

Meena is attached to Foreign Policy and Security Studies team. Her research focuses on Indian foreign policy, the geopolitics of South Asia and Malaysia and ASEAN's relations with the region. She is also interested in Global South cooperation mechanisms and understanding how inter/intra-regionalism, mini-lateralism and multilateralism function in the Indo-Pacific. Meena leads Track 2 engagements with think-tanks and institutions in South Asia. She represented Malaysia in the 2023 ASEAN-India Youth Summit and is a 2025 Raisina Young Fellow.



Zayana Zaikariah

Researcher
ISIS Malaysia

Zayana is a researcher from the Climate, Environment and Energy team. Her work focuses on climate resilience, sustainable economic transitions and environmental policy, particularly within Malaysia and the ASEAN region. She also conducts research on the sustainability of data centres, Malaysia's net-zero transition and economic resilience, contributing to policy dialogues with government agencies and stakeholders.

Scan for more information




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