

India-Thailand Strategic Partnership

Mains Syllabus: GS II - India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Why in News?

Recently, the India - Thailand relationship has been elevated to Strategic Partnership level.

What are the pillars of India- Thailand relationship?

- **Diplomatic relation** - It was established in 1947 between the two countries and both sides celebrated the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2022
- **Bilateral dialogues** - India and Thailand have institutionalized various dialogue mechanisms such as Joint Working Group on Security Cooperation; on Education; on Visa and Consular matters (ad hoc); and Joint Task Force on Maritime Cooperation.
- The two sides meet regularly to discuss bilateral cooperation and international developments in these areas.

India - Thailand : Regional and Sub-regional groupings		
INDIA	Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)	Thailand
	East Asia Summit (EAS)	
	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)	
	Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC)	
	Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD)	
	Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)	
	Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS)	

- **Mutual policies** - 'Act West' policy of Thailand complements India's 'Act East' policy.
- **Trade** - Thailand is India's 4th largest trading partner within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with total bilateral trade of around USD 14.94 billion in Fy 2023-24.

(amount in billion USD)			
Year	Total trade	Imports from Thailand	Exports to Thailand
2021-22	15.08	9.33	5.75
2022-23	16.90	11.20	5.70
2023-24	14.98	9.90	5.03

Source: Department of Commerce, India.

- **Defence cooperation** - The Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation between India and Thailand was signed on 25 January 2012.
- **Cultural cooperation** - An Indian Cultural Centre was opened in Bangkok in 2009 which was renamed as the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre.
- Regular visits of Indian cultural troupes to Thailand are organised, in addition to Indian films, food and other festivals.
- **Cooperation in Education** - MoU on Cooperation in the field of Education was signed in 2005 and India offers around 75 scholarships annually under various schemes to Thailand.
- **Indian Diaspora** - The total number of people of Indian origin in Thailand is estimated to be around 4 to 5 lakh, including more than 25,000 NRIs.

What are the recent developments?

- **High Level Exchanges** - Prime Ministers of both the countries met on the sidelines of 44th and 45th ASEAN and Related Summits.
- **Foreign Ministers Meetings** - Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand paid a visit to New Delhi for participating in Raisina Dialogue.
- **Parliamentary Interaction** - Shri Om Birla, Speaker of Lok Sabha met (Mr.) Mongkol Surasajja met the President of the Senate of Thailand on the sidelines of the 149th Assembly of IPU in Geneva in 2024.
- **Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)** - Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog Shri Suman Bery visited Thailand in 2025 to attend the 12th edition of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) in the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in Bangkok.
- **Technology partnership** - India and Thailand are focusing on next-generation industries such as electric vehicles, digital payments, fintech, space technology, and the circular economy.
- **India-Thailand Joint Trade Committee** - The 13th Joint Trade Committee (at JS level) meeting took place on 20 April 2023 in New Delhi.
- **Review of AITIGA** - Both the countries have agreed to review ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) to make it more user-friendly and conducive to business, with a target for substantial conclusion by the end of 2025.
- **Connectivity** - At the 6th BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok (April 2025), India and Thailand jointly called for faster implementation of the Motor Vehicles Agreement and enhanced coastal shipping, as well as port-to-port linkages to improve regional mobility and trade flows.
- **Digital cooperation** - An MoU was also signed between the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society of Thailand and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology of India on cooperation in the field of digital technologies.
- **Cultural development** - A special commemorative coin to mark the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Devji and the Thai translation of Tamil book, Thirukkural were released in Thailand.
- On the request of Thai government, Government of India sent the Holy Relics of Lord Buddha, along with two of his principal disciples for public exposition in 2024.
- The India-Thailand Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) for the years 2022-2027 was signed by Minister of Culture of India.

- **International Ramayana Festival** - A Indian dance troupe led by (Ms.) Ananda S Jayant performed at the opening ceremony of International Ramayana Festival at Sanam Luang ground in Bangkok.

What is the significance of Strategic Partnership with Thailand?

- The development marks a new chapter of enhanced partnership for realising the full potential of cooperation between the two countries.
- **Aim** - The strategic partnership aims to broaden cooperation across a wide array of sectors - defence, security, cybercrime, maritime safety, trade and investment, innovation, start-ups, renewable energy, education, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges.
- **Increased weightage of Southeast Asia** - The recent elevation to the strategic level indicates the growing weight of Southeast Asia in India's strategic calculus.
- **ASEAN connectivity** - Thailand acts as a gateway to the ASEAN heartland and shares maritime space in the Andaman Sea, offering potential for trilateral and multilateral maritime collaboration.
- **Strengthening regional policies** - Thailand's geopolitical location makes it significant to the success of India's Act East policy and the Indo-Pacific framework.
- **Strengthening regional stability** - Thailand's strategic infrastructure and its participation in regional forums such as ASEAN, BIMSTEC, MGC (the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation), and IORA allow it to function as a stabilising force and a bridge between South and Southeast Asia.
- **Deepening economic integration** - The current global uncertainties call for deeper coordination between the two nations to insulate their economic engagement from external shocks.
- **Countering China influence** - The expanding influence of China through its economic investments and strategic presence in the Bay of Bengal necessitates greater India-Thailand coordination to safeguard maritime commons and regional autonomy.

What are the challenges in India - Thailand relationship?

- **Trade deficit** - The widening deficit indicates the need for a more balanced trade relationship.
- India has pushed for increased market access for its agricultural products, generic drugs, and services, while also exploring the feasibility of local currency-based trade settlement mechanisms to mitigate foreign exchange volatility.
- **Delay in connectivity projects** - Infrastructure and bureaucratic delays continue to hinder the completion of vital connectivity projects like the Trilateral Highway.
- **Myanmar factor** - Political instability in Myanmar also poses risks to these initiatives.
- **Regulatory issues** - Regulatory misalignments and gaps in mutual recognition of standards and certifications could obstruct smooth economic engagement.

What lies ahead?

- To sustain and deepen the strategic partnership, India and Thailand will need to focus on implementing the Joint Plan of Action, boosting joint production and technology

transfers in defence

- Enhancing investment promotion, reducing non-tariff barriers (such as quotas and technical standards), and aligning regulatory standards will be essential in adapting to the new economic reality.
- India continues to face a significant trade deficit with Thailand and this imbalance needs to be addressed through greater market access for Indian goods and the diversification of trade baskets.
- Engaging the private sector, academia, and youth in collaborative platforms will further enrich this partnership.

Reference

[Indian Express | India-Thailand strategic partnership](#)

